SATSANG READER

PART 3

SATSANG PRAVIN

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 15

Satsang Reader

Part 3

Translation by: BAPS Sadhus
Gujarati Text: Sadhu Ishwarcharandas

Inspirer: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

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Glossary

Blessings

The youth movement established and nourished by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj has been expanding at a very rapid pace. With a view to satisfying the aspirations and the thirst for knowledge of the youth joining the organization, and also to enable them to understand and imbibe the principles of Akshar and Purushottam expounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the publications division, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, organized under the auspices of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, presents a series of books.

Through these books, it is intended to impart systematic, sustained and pure knowledge in simple language on a scholastic basis to children and youth of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It is hoped that this Sanstha, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj for implementing and propagating the Vedic ideals propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, will, through this activity, spread the ideals and noble traditions of the Sampradaya and through it, the culture and heritage of the Hindu religion.

It is the aim of this project to preach and spread the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to all corners of the world. We hope that all religious-minded truth-seekers of the Sampradaya and those outside of it, will welcome this activity and extend their fullest co-operation.

In order to encourage children and youths, annual examinations are held based on the curriculum as worked out in these books. Certificates are also awarded to successful candidates. We bless Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Prof. Rameshbhai Dave, Kishorebhai Dave, and all others who have cooperated in the preparation of these books.

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
Jai Swaminarayan

Vasant Panchmi
V.S. 2028 (1972 CE)
Atladra

Publisher's Note

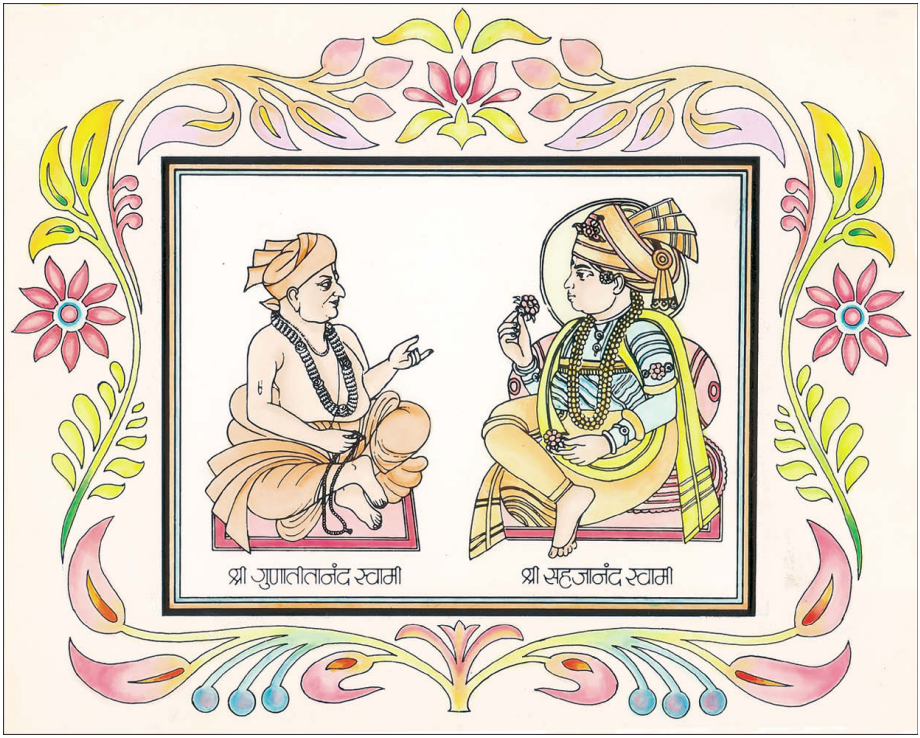
Purna Purushottam Shri Sahajanand Swami out of compassion and grace incarnated on this earth. During his life on earth, he inspired many to attain the highest spiritual state. The lives of these sadhus, and male and female devotees serve as an example for all on how to worship God and attain his divine bliss. Shriji Maharaj's work has been continued by the lineage of God-realized Sadhus he established. Spiritual seekers who have associated with them have also attained the ultimate spiritual bliss.

This publication, *Satsang Reader Part 3,* contains the short biographies of a selection of such sadhus and devotees since the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is a translation of the Gujarati book *Satsang Vachanmala Part 3*.

The book is part of the curriculum for the fourth level of the Satsang Examinations, Satsang Pravin, conducted by the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha.

It is our earnest prayer that all devotees, young and old, will study this book carefully and pass the examinations with flying colours and, above all, derive immense spiritual benefit and earn the blessings of our guru, His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith



Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine māte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine māte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānni parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar Purushottam, Gunātit jnānne gāishu...ame 2
Ame sau Shriji tanā putro, Akshare vās amāro chhe;
Svadharmi bhasma choli to, amāre kshobh shāno chhe...ame 3
Juo sau motinā Swāmi, na rākhi kai te khāmi;
Pragat Purushottam pāmi, malyā Gunātit Swāmi...ame 4

Translation

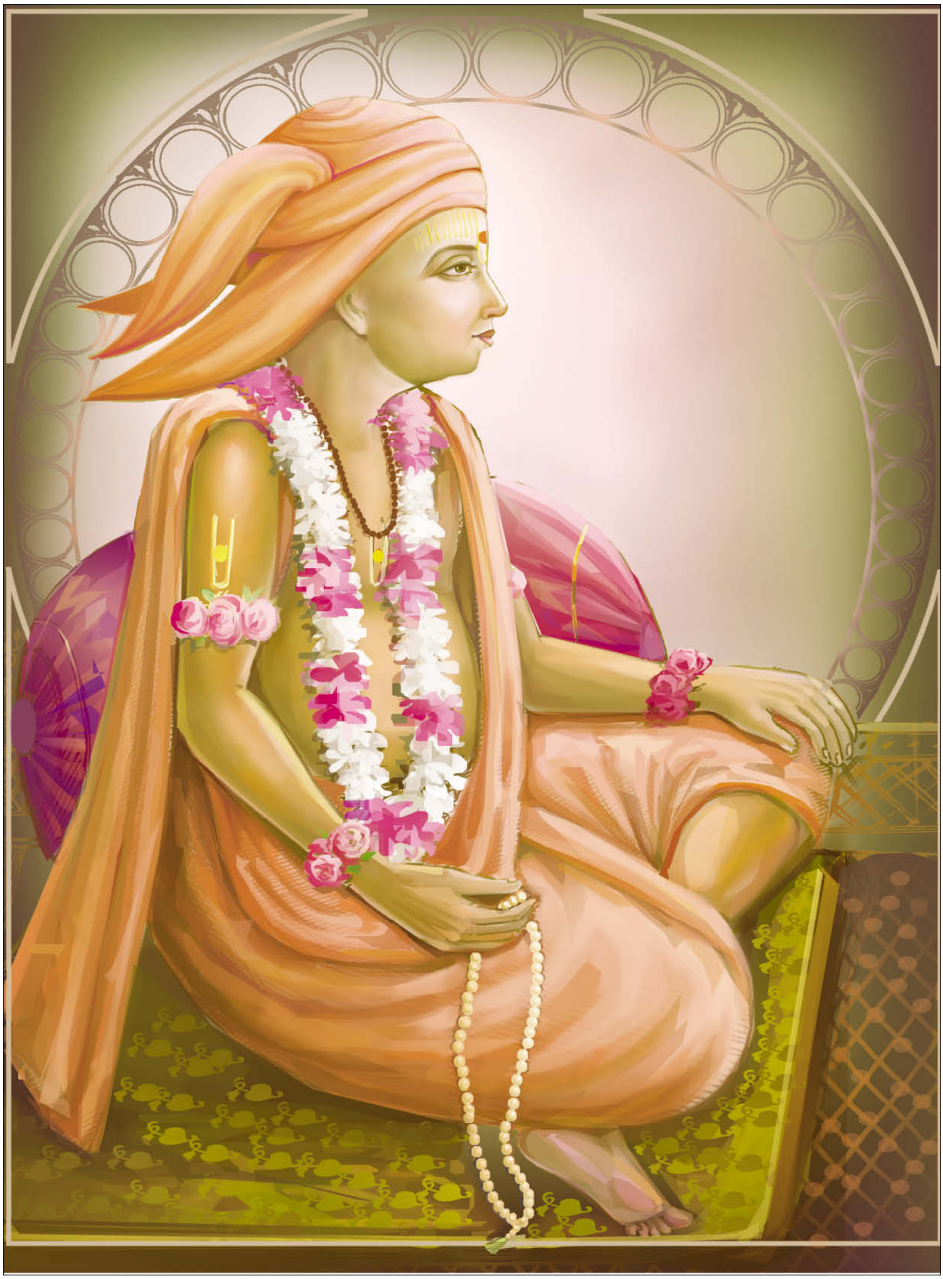
Pledge: Ame Sau Swamina Balak...

We are the children of Swami; we will die for him. We are the youths of Shriji Maharaj; we will fight for him. We are fearless; we will not shirk sacrificing our lives, for we are born to die. We have launched this movement and will undergo any suffering. We will sing the praises of Akshar-Purushottam.

We are the sons of Shriji Maharaj; we have our abode in Akshar. Consecrated as we are to *swadharma* (religious faith), we have no apprehension whatsoever. Lord Purushottam and Akshar, Gunatitanand Swami, are with us. We have accomplished our

goal.

1. Yogamurti Sadguru Gopalanand Swami



Shriji Maharaj was relaxing in the Akshar Ordi in Gadhada. Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, and other were sitting in front of him. It was

then that Maharaj asked each of them one question in turn: “What is your unique attribute?” Each revealed his special attribute. Gopalanand Swami said, “Maharaj, your will prevails throughout the countless universes, but by your grace I my word is honoured in this universe.” Hearing this, Maharaj was very happy and said, “You are right.” Gopalanand Swami was an able sadhu, a master of yoga and a sadguru.

He was born on 1 February 1781 (Maha *sud* 8, Samvat 1837) into a Brahmin family in the village of Todla in Idar district. His father was Motiram Bhatt and mother was Kushala Devi. His childhood name was Khushal. He had a fair complexion and a bright profile. His virtues, like the rising sun, began to shine from birth. At the young age of four, his father began to teach him Sanskrit, the language of the gods. Thereafter, under a Brahmin scholar in the neighbouring village of Nabhoi, he undertook an in-depth study of grammar, Nyaya (logic), astrology, astronomy, the Vedas and Vedant.

Like a seasoned yogi, he often meditated in the Shiva mandir on the other side of the river that flowed past the outskirts of Todla. Sometimes, he spent months at a time in the surrounding hilly area observing austerities. As a result of this the divine light of yoga always shone on his face.

After completing his studies, he started a school, where he taught the children of the village. He felt that merely reading and learning worldly knowledge was insufficient and so taught the children spiritual lessons, bhajans and chanting the name of God. At times, Khushal Bhagat would become so absorbed in devotion that along with him even the children attained the state of samadhi.

The daily routine of Khushal Bhagat comprised darshan, puja, spiritual discourses and service of sadhus. His spiritually centred life was full of miracles.

* * *

The famous ancient mandir of Shamalaji is situated a few miles from Todla. One morning when the *pujari* opened the doors of the mandir shrines, he was shocked to find that the *murti* of Shamalaji was missing from its sacred throne. He closed the doors and ran to call others to the spot. When the door was opened again everyone saw that the *murti* was in its place. The *pujari* was perplexed when he again saw this. The other people suspected that the *pujari* had something to hide. They examined the clothes and ornaments of the *murti* and found that one *jari* garment and one foot ornament were missing. They charged the *pujari* with theft and began to scold him.

Suddenly, a voice came from the *murti*, “The *pujari* is not at fault. I go everyday to Todla to play with one of my devotees, Khushal Bhagat. Today, the *pujari* opened the inner mandir before the scheduled time so, I had to hurry back. As a result, I dropped one of my garments and ornaments on the way. If you go there you’ll find them there.” On hearing this everyone was surprised.

Khushal Bhagat’s mother, while sweeping her compound, found a *jari* garment and a foot ornament in the courtyard. She began to look around. Seeing this, her son smiled and said, “Leave them there. The owners will soon come and take them.” Within a short time, people from Shamalaji arrived there. They bowed before Khushal Bhakta, narrated the whole incident to his mother and took away the things. Kushaladevi was delighted to learn of this divine exploit of her son.

* * *

There are many such miraculous incidents recorded. On one occasion, the ruler of Idar had levied a tax of three rupees per head on the Brahmins. The Brahmins requested the ruler to withdraw the levy but their request was turned down. In those days, the fame of this young devotee, Khushal Bhakta, had spread far and wide. The Brahmins considered him to be a divine soul capable of working miracles, and tried to persuade the ruler through him. But the ruler had become blind with pride and remained indifferent to the words of this young devotee. So Bhakta Khushal took all the Brahmins along with him to a well outside the village and began to pray to God to grant good counsel to the ruler.

How can God tolerate such injustice to his devotee? Hence, by God's will, the ruler, members of his family and staff were suddemly unable to pass water or motions. There was unrest in entire palace and everyone was vexed by the problem. Somebody then advised, "This is all probably because of the insult hurled at young Khushal Bhakta, so only if you apologize to him will everything return to normal." The ruler was also convinced about this. He and his people approached the young Khushal Bhakta and humbly apologized. Then Khushal Bhakta said to the king, "We request you to withdraw the levy and prepare an agreement on a copper plate that no tax will be levied on the Brahmins of the state." When the ruler and his people did as requested they returned to normal. Everyone was happy, and realized the glory of Khushal Bhakta.

* * *

After a few years, Khushal Bhakta heard about the manifestation and glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan from two devotees of Vadashinor, named Kashirambhai and Muralidharbhai. This triggered his innate spirituality and he developed a deep desire for Maharaj's darshan.

Around this time, he met Sarveshwaranandji, a *paramhansa* of Shriji Maharaj, in the village Nabhoi. Bhakta Khushal accepted initiation from him and became a disciple of Shriji Maharaj. Khushal Bhakta developed a strong desire for the darshan of Maharaj. He had the darshan of Maharaj for the first time in Dabhan. Just as a river merges into the ocean, Khushal Bhakta became immersed in the divine form of Maharaj. He was overwhelmed with affection. His tears of joy washed the lotus feet of Maharaj, who was also very happy to see his devotee. Due to the spiritual wisdom of past births, Khushal Bhakta instantly developed the conviction that Maharaj is God.

There was no reason whatsoever for any further delay. Khushal Bhakta wished to renounce the world at that moment and requested Maharaj to allow him to dwell at his lotus feet. Maharaj advised postponement and sent him back home. However, Khushal Bhakta grew restless. His desire to renounce the world and stay in the company of God increased daily.

* * *

Once, a Brahmin arrived at Khushal Bhakta's home. Bhakta Khushal set out with the Brahmin towards Gujarat in the hope of meeting Maharaj. On their way, the Brahmin fed Khushal Bhakta, removed thorns from his feet (since he had no shoes) and served

him in other ways. When they arrived in Jetalpur, the Brahmin parted company from Khushal Bhakta,saying, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan is camping here. You go and meet him, I’ll meet him later.” Khushal Bhakta was delighted and immediately made his way for Maharaj’s darshan. Maharaj was very happy to see him and enquired about his journey. Khushal Bhakta narrated how he had travelled in the company of a Brahmin. On hearing this, Maharaj began to laugh. Then Maharaj related some of the details of his journey, and that convinced Khushal Bhakta of the fact that Maharaj himself had come to fetch him in the guise of a Brahmin. He was overwhelmed and fell at the feet of Maharaj.

Thereafter, for some time, by the wish of Maharaj, Khushal Bhakta served as a teacher at a school in Sarsavani near Vadodara. Later on, under instructions from Maharaj, he stayed at Sadashivbhai’s place in Vadodara, where he conducted discourses guiding aspirants onto the spiritual path.

At last, the auspicious day for renunciation arrived. Maharaj invited Khushal Bhakta to the court of Dada Khachar in Gadhada, and on 23 November 1807 (Kartik *vad* 8, Samvat 1864), initiated him into the sadhu-order and named him ‘Gopalanand Swami’.

As instructed by Maharaj, Gopalanand Swami spent most of his time in Vadodara. This city was full of scholars, so it was difficult to spread Satsang there. However, to his own scholarship and asceticism, he inspired many scholars, state officials, local citizens and even the ruler, Sayajirao Gaekwad, to accept Satsang and become disciples of Maharaj.

* * *

He performed miracles, and consequently Satsang spread in this region.

Once, a Vishnuyag was being performed in Vadodara. On this occasion, the hosts asked the presiding priest a question, “Would Yagna Narayan, the *yagna* deity, give us darshan?” The presiding priest was a highly devout soul and replied, “If the offerings are made by a pious sadhu, then Yagna Narayan will certainly give darshan.” People knew that Gopalanand Swami was such a sadhu. Hence, he was requested to make the offerings in the *yagna.* Kind-hearted Swami obliged them by making the offerings in the *yagna*. To everyone’s surprise, Yagna Narayan emerged from the flames and gave darshan. Everyone present was extremely delighted.

* * *

A Brahmin *satsangi* resided in Vadodara and was an expert astrologer. Once, a lunar eclipse was approaching. The *satsangi* astrologer made some calculations and declared, “The eclipse will not be seen on that day.” Other astrologers of the city also made calculations and announced, “The eclipse will certainly be seen.” The *satsangi* astrologer was firm and threw a challenge, “If I am wrong I am prepared to lose my head.”

The controversy eventually reached Gopalanand Swami. Swami knew that the ecplise was to be seen, but since his devotee had staked his head, he told the other astrologers, “This time the eclipse will not be seen.” Everyone was perplexed to hear Swami’s words and waited for the day of eclipse.

The day of the eclipse arrived, and, as stated by Swami, the eclipse was not seen!

All the experts and scholars were astonished. Then the Swami sent for the *satsangi* astrologer and told him, "Dear devotee, never stake your head like this in future. The eclipse was certainly to be seen, but Maharaj stopped it for your sake." The devotee was wonderstruck by Swami's prowess to change the rotation routine of the planets.

* * *

Sarangpur is a village located on the way from Gujarat to Gadhada. Pilgrims on their way to Gadhada oten stopped here to rest at the *darbar* of Vagha Khachar. He treated everyone with warm hospitality and served all the sadhus and devotees. Vagha Khachar had only a small income to meet all his costs. After some time, he became worried about how he would be able to continue serving others under such circumstances.

Gopalanand Swami kindly decided to rescue him from his difficulty. He had a *murti* of Hanumanji prepared, and consecrated it in one of rooms of Vagha Khachar's court. Swami touched the *murti* with his stick, infusing the *murti* with such divine power that it began to shake. He invoked Hanumanji, who had served Maharaj during his forest sojourns, into the *murti*. By Swami's wish, the *murti* of Hanumanji displayed great powers by exorcising spirits and ghosts from possessed people and fulfilling everyone's wishes. People flocked there from various places to attain relief from their miseries, and made offerings at the feet of Hanumanji. Thus, this became a source of income for Vagha Khachar and enabled him to continue serving the visiting sadhus and devotees. Later on, he gave this income to the mandir in Gadhpur. Even today, the powers of this *murti* of Hanumanji consecrated by Swami are evident. (During his tenure as *mahant*, Shastriji Maharaj renovated this mandir, erected a huge edifice here and increased the importance of this place).

* * *

Swami's flowing style of discoursing was wonderful. Listening to his scholarly sermons, aspirants developed detachment from the world, strengthened their faith in Satsang and increased their devotion to Maharaj. Swami had imparted spiritual knowledge to Paramchaitanyanand Swami, Sadashivbhai of Vadodara, Himraj Sheth of Sundariyana, and many other devotees and strengthened their faith in Maharaj.

Manbha, a resident of Mengani, was very fond of hunting. He ate non-vegetarian food and indulged freely in alcoholic drinks. Manbha, who was completely drenched in this sinful behaviour, used to convene recitals of the Ramayan in his court, in keeping with his family custom. Sometimes, he took time out to attend the narrations. On one such occasion, the following verse was recited:

"Nāri nayan shar jāhi na lāgā,
Ghor krodh nishi jo jāgā,
Lobh-pāsh jehi nar na bandhāyā,
So nar tam sangāt Raghurāyā."

On hearing this, the Darbar asked Jetha Maharaj, a Brahmin who was reciting the scripture, "Is there any such person in your Swaminarayan Sampradaya?" Jetha Maharaj talked about Gopalanand Swami and described his glory. This enlightened Manbha, and he developed a desire for Swami's darshan.

Manbha invited Swami to visit his village. After a few days Gopalanand Swami, in the course of his village travels, arrived at Mengani. However, Manbha had gone out of town for some work. So, the sadhus put up at a farm outside the village. Soon, Manbha returned. News that the sadhus had come brought joy to his heart and lit the flame of faith within. He went for their darshan along with his accomplices. Swami was seated in meditation. Manbha humbly stood before Swami with folded hands. Swami emerged from meditation and looked at Manbha, instantly sending him into samadhi. Manbha had the darshan of Shriji Maharaj in Akshardham. As a result of his association with Swami, Manbha realized the true glory of Maharaj. His heart became pure and he matured into a dedicated devotee.

* * *

Gopalanand Swami, who was both learned and saintly, was spiritually enlightened. In Kariyani, Maharaj revealed to him the six motives for his manifestation on earth. Before leaving for Akshardham, Maharaj entrusted him with the responsibility of Vartal and Ahmedabad mandirs. At the same time, Maharaj directed, "Although I have made you a senior, pay special respect to Gunatitanand Swami, who is the manifest form of my Akshardham."

Maharaj had instructed all the sadhus and devotees, "Go to Junagadh every year for one month and remain in the company of Gunatitanand Swami." So, Gopalanand Swami used to go to Junagadh every year to remain in the company of Gunatitanand Swami. When discoursing the assemblies, Gopalanand Swami talked about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as the manifest form of Akshardham. He had realized the infinite glory of Gunatitanand Swami. Moreover, he had narrated this glory to his sadhus and devotees, and sent them to seek his company. Some of his disciples included Achintyanand Brahmachari, Madhavpriyadas Swami, Madhavcharan Swami, Pragji Bhakta, Jaga Bhakta, Shivlalbhai, Jibhai Shelat, Keshavjivandasji, and others.

Gunatitanand Swami often narrated the greatness of Gopalanand Swami during his discourses, saying, "Gopalanand Swami is like an ocean. He can transport infinite *jivas* beyond *maya*. *Muktas* range in type from those like a mosquito to an eagle. He is like an eagle. As God is with Gopalanand Swami if we stayed with him for two years or four *kalpas* we would not find it difficult. Alas! The *jivas* failed to realize the true greatness of personalities like Gopalanand Swami and Raghuvirji Maharaj."

* * *

Since Swami had mastered *ashtang-yoga* his body was slim and delicate. But his enthusiasm for observing austerities had not at all diminished. Once a devotee presented a silken dhoti to him and affectionately insisted that Swami should wear it till it tore. Swami devised a plan so that he did not disappoint the devotee, and at the same time, obeyed Maharaj's orders. He tied the dhoti so tightly that as he was about to sit it was torn. He changed it immediately. In this way, he respected the wish of Maharaj for not donning a silken or embroidered cloth.

* * *

He never consumed milk, ghee or fried foods. He ate chapattis without spreading ghee on them. Often, he offered his own share of ghee to the fire deity. As a result of

this his body was weak. To look after his health so that the devotees would benefit, Gunatitanand Swami told him, “Swami, you are now aged, so please spread some ghee on the chapattis you eat.”

Swami did not wish to do so. However, Gunatitanand Swami once gave him a chapatti with ghee spread on it. At Gunatitanand Swami’s affectionate insistence, Swami did ate it, but then said, “Now I’ll no longer be able to talk on detachment and renunciation. From now onwards, you talk on these topics.” Such was his determination to practice.

* * *

Some sadhus were envious of Swami’s saintly and austere life, and so they tried to have him insulted and excommunicated from Satsang. But these attempts were foiled with the help of Gunatitanand Swami’s unreserved support. On one such occasion, someone had put burning coal in Swami’s cloth-bag, in an attempt to burn away his valuable manuscripts. Despite such attempts to harass and humiliate him, he always forgave them and spoke positively.

One particular instance of his compassion is indeed heart-moving. A devotee named Hamir lapsed in his vow of celibacy. Everyone expelled him from Satsang. However as Hamir was very devout, he repented very much. He beseeched the sadhus to take him back, but everyone was against it. Eventually, the matter reached the merciful Gopalanand Swami. He reasoned with everyone, saying, “If Hamir remains away from the satsang he will degenerate further. Now that he had repented he should atone for his mistake and be taken back into Satsang.” In this way, he forgave their faults to elevate the seekers.

* * *

There were sixty sadhus in Gopalanand Swami’s group. Among them the obedient Sarvanivasanand Swami, Balmukundanand Swami and Vijayatmanand Swami were senior. Later on, he sent these three senior sadhus to Junagadh to remain in the company of Gunatitanand Swami.

On many occasions, it was quite discernible that those aspirants who came into his contact derived great spiritual benefits. Once, Swami reached Botad during his travels to the villages. He was tired due to the long journey. One of the sadhus volunteered to massage his body. Swami’s fatigue began to disappear and he was soon asleep. In the middle of the night he suddenly woke up and found that the sadhu was still massaging his body. Swami enquired, “Have you not gone yet?” The sadhu politely replied, “No, I have been here since last night.” Swami was pleased from within and said, “You have removed the pain of my body, I’ll remove your pain from within.”

* * *

At that time, it was not possible to talk openly about the supremacy of Shriji Maharaj due to the prevailing belief that only past avatars can grant liberation. So once, when Swami was in Umreth, Maharaj appeared to him in a dream and said, “Spread my supreme glory, otherwise I will make you remain on earth for a hundred years and, if need be, for even a thousand years.”

Swami was moved by this command from Maharaj. In the morning Swami talked to

Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj, senior sadhus Shivlal Sheth and others about the supremacy of Maharaj, “All the avatars of God emerge from Parabrahman Purushottam. They are sustained by his powers, and finally merge into his form. For our ultimate redemption, that Parabrahman Purushottam was born in human form as Sahajanand Swami. He is the supreme God we worship.”

On hearing this, Akhandanand Brahmachari was shocked. He wondered, “All avatars worship Maharaj while standing on one leg. How can that be? This belittles the avatars.” Many understood Maharaj to be an avatar, just like Shri Krishna and others. The Brahmachari was so shocked that he had an attack of diarrhoea and he became restless. He could not accept this fact. Raghuvirji Maharaj consoled him and said, “All of us understand in the same way as you do, but Swami is a yogi and what he says is due to his mastery of yoga.”

Later on, Raghuvirji Maharaj told Swami not to talk about such hard facts in public. Swami replied, “It was your father (Bhagwan Swaminarayan) who had ordered me to talk about his true identity and glory, and hence this talk; but henceforth, if you so desire, I’ll not talk so.” After this incident, Swami was restless and resolved to retire to the Akshardham.

* * *

From Umreth, Swami went to Vartal. Here, Swami developed a painful abscess near his ear. Gradually it began to grow. He fasted for twenty-one days, so his body became emaciated. Everyone was worried that Swami would now discard his mortal frame. As a result of this, affectionate sadhus and devotees began to pour in from various places.

Some devotees who had come there on the occasion of Vaishakh Punam approached him the next day to seek his permission to leave. Swami had just returned from his morning routine and was busy washing his hands. When devotees like Bapu Raiji and Premchand Raiji of Vadodara and others requested him, “O merciful Swami, please cast your blessed looks in the direction of Vadodara.” Satsang in Vadodara had progressed as a result of Swami’s efforts and guidance. Therefore, it was natural for them to make such a request. Swami, who was detached like the sky, beamed a smile, despite his pain, and said, “Now it is not possible to look in the direction of Vadodara. Now I look towards either Maharaj in Akshardham or Mul Akshar Gunatitanand Swami, the Jogi of Junagadh.”

At that moment none could understand the full import of Swami’s remark. Later on, when Pragji Bhakta and Shivlalbhai requested for an explanation, Swami said, “Maharaj is the supreme Godhead and Gunatitanand Swami is his Dham, abode. What else could one aspire for except these two divine forms?”

This was the spiritual state of this master of yoga. He had performed great tasks according to the wish of Maharaj, but within he was always focused on Sahajanand Swami and his Dham, Gunatitanand Swami.

On 7 May 1852 (Vaishakh *vad* 4, Samvat 1908), Swami relinquished his mortal frame by the power of his yogic strength. Sadness spread throughout the entire Satsang. Gunatitanand Swami and other senior sadhus consoled everybody. After showing the path of liberation to many souls and also making them happy in this

world, Swami himself left the world to remain eternally in the service of Maharaj in his divine abode.

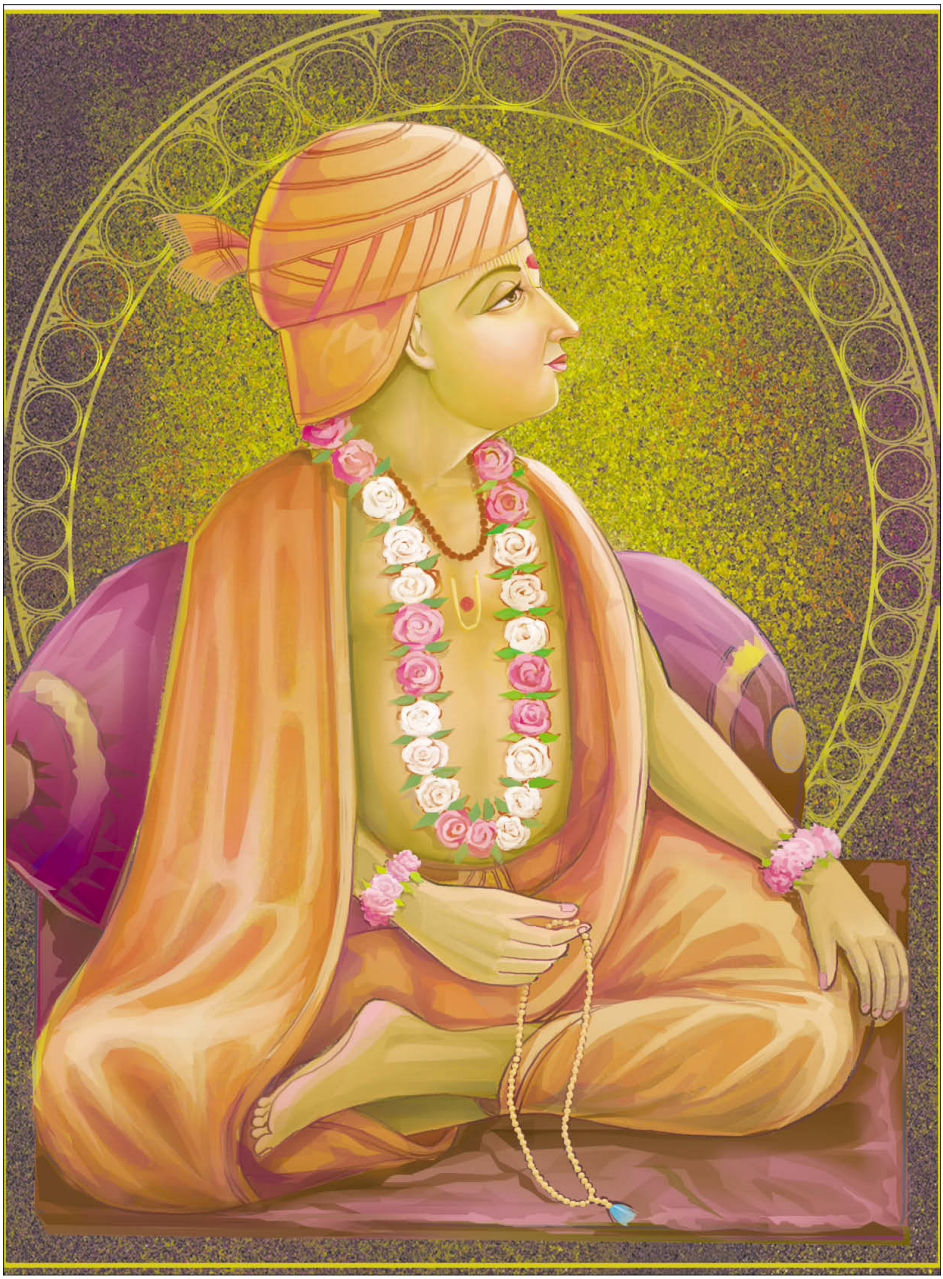
* * *

Gopalanand Swami made invaluable literary contributions to the Satsang. He helped to edit the Vachanamrut, the spiritual discourses of Shriji Maharaj, in collaboration with Nityanand Swami, Muktanand Swami, and Shuk Muni.

He also wrote commentaries in Sanskrit on the Upanishads, the Brahmasutras, the Bhagvad Gita and the Veda Stuti. In this way he highlighted the Vedic tradition of the Sampraday and the Vedic basis of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. In these commentaries, through logical arguments, he has wonderfully described the dual worship of Brahman with Parabrahman, Narayan with Swami, that is God and his ideal devotee.

Shastriji Maharaj recognized the great contributions of Gopalanand Swami in spreading the true upasana of Akshar Purushottam Satsang by consecrating Gopalanand Swami's *murti* along with that of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami in the mandirs.

2. Sadguru Muktanand Swami



Vā'lā rumjhum kartā kān, māre gher āvo re,
Mārā purā karvā kod, hasine bolāvo re... 1

Māre tam sang lāgi prit, Shām sohāgi re,
Me to tam sang ramvā kāj, lajjā tyāgi re... 2
Vā'lā abalā upar maher, karjo Morāri re,
Hu to janmojanmani Nāth, dāsi tamāri re... 3
Mārā prān tanā ādhār, Pritam pyārā re,
Pal raho mā Natvar nāv, mujthi nyārā re... 4
Āvo chhogā meline Shyām, dadhak ma dhāro re,
Me to fulde samāri sej, Shyām sudhāro re... 5
Vā'lā nayanā tanu fal āj, mujne āpo re,
Muktānand kahe Mahārāj, dukhdā kāpo re... 6

"O Dear Krishna, please come to my place with those sweet jingling sounds.
Please address me with a smile in order to fulfil my desires.
O Dear Shyam, my Master, the Handsome, I have fallen in love with you.
I have abandoned all inhibitions in order to play with you…"

The main road of the city of Vadodara was decorated with artistic designs and splendour befitting the Gaekwad kingdom. A fair-complexioned Swaminarayan sadhu, clad in saffron coloured robes, was dancing and singing the above song, with *kartal* in hands and anklets jingling on feet. Thousands of people watched the sadhu, who was lost in the divinity of the occasion. A group of sadhus followed, adding splendour to the atmosphere. The entire scene made an indelible mark on the hearts of the many scholars and sannyasis who were on their way to the Royal Court.

The Chief Administrator, Narupant Nana, welcomed this group of sadhus when they reached the Royal Court. Rajya Pundit Shri Shobharam Shastri, eminent scholar Shri Chimanrao Janardan, and many others also greeted them. The group of sadhus was headed by Muktanand Swami, who had fascinated everyone with his devotional dancing and chanting. The king courteously offered him an appropiate seat. Before taking his seat, Swami humbly bowed to the king and the entire assembly.

The vain scholars, submerged in the ego of their knowledge and busy in futile debates, were dumbfounded by the humility of Muktanand Swami. Discussion on the shastras began under the orders of the Gaekwad. Seeing such a huge assembly, the unassuming Muktanand Swami hesitated at first, but on remembering Maharaj gained inner strength.

Muktanand Swami proved that the Swaminarayan Sampraday was in accordance with the shastras. He removed the misunderstanding people had that the only way to liberation, until God manifest in future as Kalki, was by chanting God's name. He asserted that the fundamental means to liberation was attainment of God in human form, and that offering *upasana* to God-incarnate was a must for attaining ultimate redemption. With his logical explanations, he established that Shriji Maharaj was the supreme avatar.

The scholars were awestruck by Swami's eloquence, which was like the incessant flow of the river Ganga. The king and the audience were satisfied and hailed the glory of Swaminarayan in unison. The jealous scholars were defeated; their designs were revealed and the authenticity of the Sampraday was recognized. Muktanand Swami,

who had come there for this debate on the instructions of Maharaj, returned with his group of sadhus to Adaraj via Vartal. Maharaj embraced him with affection and expressed great delight.

* * *

This great sadhu was a genius and as calm as the sea. He was born on 4 February 1758 (Posh *vad* 11, Samvat 1814), in Amreli, Kathiawad. His father's name was Anandraj and mother's name was Radha. The child who was devoted to Bal Mukund was rightly named Mukunddas. At a very young age he studied the shastras, such as, the Bhagvad Gita and Shrimad Bhagvat, from his father. Mukunddas was well-versed in poetry and music, and had a natural aptitude for them.

It was an irony of fate that this handsome and talented child was, from birth, indifferent towards this world. On the one hand, his parents wished that he enter into wedlock. On the other hand, the devout Mukund had a singular craving to detach himself from this world. But the wish of his parents prevailed in the end. Thereafter, Mukunddas, who was still keen to escape from the fetters of the world, moved away from his family and settled at Amarapur, near Amreli, and began his married life. Here, during his leisure hours he gained knowledge, about the Ramanuj Sampraday from Hathiram and Jaduram, two scholarly disciples of Mahatma Muldas. He also realized the prime importance and necessity of *brahmacharya* for reaching God.

* * *

As a result of the impressions of his past spiritual endeavours, his desire for celibacy became so strong that he found married life intolerable. One day he left his home and set out in search of a true guru who would help him to perfect *brahmacharya*. Moving from place to place he came to Bawa Dwarkadas, at Dhrangadhra. When Mukunddas expressed his wish, the Bawaji resisted the temptation of keeping such an excellent disciple and frankly admitted, "I am not capable of becoming your guru, but go to Bawa Kalyandas at Vakaner, who wears a brass underwear with an iron lock and observes *brahmacharya*. He is the right person for you to approach."

Mukunddas hurried to Kalyandas at Vakaner. The Mahatma was surrounded by a number of his devotees. Finding a suitable opportunity in solitude, Mukunddas expressed his wish, "I want to observe *brahmacharya*, so please guide me." Kalyandas was astonished to hear the question of this youngster and said, "Young man! You are still young and handsome. What has come over you? You have not yet experienced youth. You will realize itlater."

Here also, by the inspiration of God, Kalyandas recognized Mukunddas as a true aspirant, and told him plainly, "Forty years ago, when I was on my way to Kashi, I reached the outskirts of Morbi. There, I asked a woman who was fetching water directions for the road to Ujjain. She gestured with her hand to direct me. Even today, I have not been able to remove that gesture from my mind; so it is practically impossible for anyone to observe total *brahmacharya*."

This frank talk of Kalyandas disappointed Mukunddas. This young aspirant firmly believed that life without *brahmacharya* was of no avail since it would not lead to God-realization. Dejected, he decided to commit suicide. He climbed a huge tree and was

about to jump, when he heard a divine voice addressing him, “Dear son! Why are you trying to kill yourself? You’ll certainly attain God. Go to Sardhar.”

Now, Mukunddas did not delay even a moment. With lightning speed he reached Sardhar. Here, he sought refuge under Mahant Tulsidas of the Ramji Mandir, situated in the village square. Seeing such a fine and young disciple, the aging Mahant was delighted and thought that God was pleased with his devotion and had favoured him by sending such a disciple. He entrusted the entire administration to Mukunddas and the village people also accepted him.

But Mukunddas was ill at ease. He wondered if the divine words would come true and counted the days as he waited for his wish to be fulfilled. One day, it so happened that no one turned up at the village square to attend the daily discourses. On enquiry, Mukunddas found that a saintly sadhu named Ramanand Swami, who was a devotee of Krishna, had come to the village and was delivering enlightening spiritual discourses. There was a flash of inspiration in the heart of Mukunddas and the next day, after winding up his routine affairs, he hid himself in the bushes behind where Ramanand Swami was discoursing. Meanwhile, the watchman who was on his usual round arrived there, and seeing somebody in the bush, shouted; but Mukunddas quietly introduced himself and said, “I am hiding out of fear that my guru finds out I am listening to Ramanand Swami’s discourses.”

After the discourses the crowd dispersed. When Ramanand Swami was alone, Mukunddas rushed to him and wept openly. The darshan and spiritual discourses of Swami had already enlightened his heart. He was convinced that this was the *sadguru* referred to by the divine voice he had heard. He requested Swami to accept him under his care and help him practice perfect *brahmacharya*. Swami consoled him, touched his head with affection and asked who he was. Mukunddas introduced himself. Knowing that he was a follower of another guru, Swami hesitated a bit and said, “You are a disciple of Tulsidas, who is a revered sadhu in the village. So without his consent I accept you, otherwise I shall have to go away from here.” Once again, Mukunddas experienced a sense of frustration. He returned to the village disappointed.

When he reached the village square, he made up his mind to anyhow obtain the permission of his guru and to go to Ramanand Swami. He knew that it was not easy to obtain the permission, so he played a trick. He began to indiscriminately distribute the rations and mandir property to pilgrims and resident sadhus. When Tulsidas stopped him and asked for an explanation, he replied, “I am the Mahant of this mandir. I am free to do as I like.” Tulsidas thought that he had gone mad and that could be one of the reasons why nobody was ready to keep him. So he relieved Mukunddas of his charge. Mukunddas reached Bandhia and met Ramanand Swami with great delight. Swami was happy to see his enthusiasm and aspiration. But in order to test him further, Swami sent him to Mulubha’s farm to plough the land. Mukunddas was willing. He began to plough the land and sing devotional songs. However, as he had never done this sort of work Mulubha feared that he might be injured, and so requested Swami to stop him.

Yet another test awaited him. Swami said, “You are married, so only if you obtain

the written consent of your wife will I keep you." Mukunddas left for his home. Seeing him back, all the members of his family were delighted. Until, to their surprise, he began to behave like a mad man. He began to exchange the children and cots of his neighbours without their knowledge and kept on chanting, *"Rama katākat mahudu bhāṇgyu."* After some time everyone was fed up, and gave him permission to leave. Having thus obtained their permission he went straight to Swami, who was pleased by his determination.

* * *

At Bandhia, Ramanand Swami initiated him into the sadhu-fold on 3 February 1876 (Vasant Panchmi, Samvat 1842), and named him 'Muktanand'. Thus, Mukunddas of the Margi Sect became a Vaishnav sadhu. Then, Muktanand Swami, along with Devanand Swami, went to Bhuj in the Kutch region to study Sanskrit, as instructed by Ramanand Swami.

In Bhuj they studied and also preached to the aspirants. Devotees, like Sunderjibhai, the chief administrator of Kutch, Hirjibhai, Gangaram Malla, and others came into their contact. After the completion of their studies, both sadhus returned and settled in the ashram of Ramanand Swami in Loj, near port town of Mangrol.

Ramanand Swami considered Muktanand Swami to be an exemplary sadhu. He made him the head of the ashram and placed a group of fifty sadhus under him. Muktanand Swami was full of saintly qualities and looked after all the sadhus. He guided them in their service to God and enlightened them with his holy discourses. By his efforts, satsang began to spread in the village of Loj and the surrounding area.

* * *

In August 1799, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in the form of Nilkanth Varni, arrived in Loj. Muktanand Swami received him warmly. He also gave satisfactory replies to Varni's questions about the five eternal realities. Varni was very pleased. Realizing his glory, Muktanand Swami persuaded him to stay in the ashram, and also explained to him the greatness of guru Ramanand Swami.

As both of them became more and more acquainted, Muktanand Swami further realized the divine glory of Nilkanth Varni. Although he was senior in age, and was the head of the ashram, he began to honour the wishes of Varni.

It was here that for the first time that Nilkanth separated the assemblies for males and females. Also, some sadhus used to exchanged lighted coals with the neighbouring women through a hole in the common wall between the ashram and the adjoining house. Nilkanth stopped this practice and had the hole sealed. An ardent champion of the cause of *brahmacharya*, Muktanand Swami readily accepted both the reforms effected by Nilkanth. Muktanand Swami gave saffron robes to Nilkanth Varni and also called him by the nickname of 'Sarjudas'. Seeing Sarjudas' expertise in yoga, Muktanand Swami requested him to teach yoga to the sadhus. Together with his group of sadhus, Muktanand Swami keenly listened to the discourses of Sarjudas. As a result of his severe austerities the body of Sarjudas was emaciated. So Muktanand Swami used to look after his physical needs. Muktanand Swami was 23 years older than Sarjudas, who was only about twenty then. But Muktanand Swami was so simple in

manner that it reveals his friendly, humble and generous nature.

* * *

Once, after completing his morning routine, Muktanand Swami sat in meditation. Nearby, he had placed his freshly painted gourd to dry in the sun. Suddenly, he heard the sound of a dog approaching. Swami arose from meditation and drove away the dog, lest it should damage the gourd. Seeing this, Sarjudas asked, "Swami, where is your attention? Is it in the gourd or in meditation? Or are both equal for you?" Swami immediately grasped the meaning and felt embarrassed. This incident shows the positive influence Sarjudas had over Swami.

* * *

Soon afterwards, Ramanand Swami initiated Sarjudas into the sadhu-order and named him Sahajanand Swami. Before leaving his mortal body and departing to Dham, Ramanand Swami decided to appoint Sahajanand Swami in his place. On this occasion, he invited his senior disciples, both sadhus and devotees, and described the glory of Sahajanand Swami. He sought everybody's consent by saying, "Sahajanand is the real actor and I am merely a conch-blower, hailing his arrival." On this occasion, Muktanand Swami also wholeheartedly gave his consent. There was no question in his mind as to why he himself should not be appointed as leader. In return, Sahajanand Swami treated Muktanand Swami with great respect and considered him as his guru, in place of Ramanand Swami.

After Ramanand Swami's passing away, Maharaj (Sahajanand Swami was now also called Shriji Maharaj) began to grant samadhi. This upset Muktanand Swami. Even when graced disciples close to Muktanand Swami, he still could not believe it. However, Ramanand Swami gave him darshan and explained the infinite glory of Shriji Maharaj. Ramanand Swami explained that this Sahajanand Swami is Purushottam Narayan incarnate and convinced him. Muktanand Swami then lifted Maharaj and placed him on Ramanand Swami's seat, performed his puja and composed the *arti, "Jai Sadguru Swami..."* He also composed a kirtan:

"Bhramanā bhāngi re haiyāni,
Nathi e vāt kene kahyāni;
Viti hoy re te jāne,
Anasamajyā man irshā āne…"

"The misunderstanding in my heart has been removed,
and this cannot be confided to anyone;
Only those who have experienced it know.
others who are ignorant, are merely envious..."

After this incident, Maharaj gave a small stick to Muktanand Swami as *prasad*. Whoever he touched with the stick experienced samadhi. In this way, many experienced samadhi at his word.

* * *

Muktanand Swami and other sadhus used to travel to the villages, on the command of Maharaj, in order to spread Satsang. But on their way they had to suffer many hardships and obstacles hurled by *matpanthis*. Once a jealous bawa tied Muktanand

Swami and Brahmanand Swami to a pole and began to sharpen his knife in order to cut off their ears and noses. Brahmanand Swami began to lament, "If this bawa cuts our ears and noses, people would think that we had done something wrong." However, Muktanand Swami reasoned, "In past births we must have endured much humiliation for our spouses and children. So in this birth let us endure it for the sake of Maharaj. As for our good name, it is in the hands of Maharaj and he'll certainly protect us."

Meanwhile, a person named Raghav Jat came there and asked the bawa why he was sharpening the knife. Surprisingly, the bawa told the truth in reply. Raghav Jat realized that this cruel bawa would torture these meek, innocent sadhus. Therefore, he threatened the bawa, made him release the sadhus and saw them off safely away from the village.

On another occasion, some people who were envious of the saintliness of Muktanand Swami mixed poison with sandalwood paste and, under the pretext of puja, smeared it on the body of Muktanand Swami. By the grace of Maharaj, nothing happened to Swami, but the skin of the hand of the person who had smeared it peeled off. In this way, Swami used to tolerate such hardships and pain in order to please the Lord.

* * *

Muktanand Swami was welcomed and respected wherever he went due to his saintly qualities, unassuming attitude and the good counsel he gave. He inspired a respect for satsang among people. Swami gave discourses describing the glory of Maharaj and convinced many to seek refuge in Maharaj. He spread satsang in Surat, Ahmedabad and other cities. Maharaj also used to send him to various places.

Once, Muktanand Swami arrived in Ahmedahad with a group of sixty sadhus. Here, they put up at the Dariyakhan Ghummat, on the banks of the river Sabarmati. The sadhus used to bathe in the river, meditate, hold spiritual discourses, beg for alms and eat only a quarter *sher* of food from that. If they did not get anything in alms they used to fast.

In this way, Muktanand Swami spread satsang in Vartal and its surrounding areas, in the Kanam region and in all other places where Maharaj sent him. He won the debate in Vadodara, where Maharaj had ordered him to go. Similarly, in Jamnagar also, Maharaj ordered Muktanand Swami to participate in a debate on on scriptures, although Nityanand Swami and other scholar sadhus were present. Again, in the royal assembly, in presence of Maharaj himself, Swami defeated the doubting scholars and proved that the Swaminarayan Sampraday is in accordance with the Vedas.

* * *

As time passed, Muktanand Swami increasingly realized the divine glory of Maharaj. His realization is clearly reflected in his poetic compositions. When he realized the supreme identity of Maharaj, he wrote, *"Sukhdāyak re Swāmi Sahajānand, Pragat Purushottam Shri Hari..."* ("Sahajanand, who is Purushottam Shri Hari manifest, is the giver of divine bliss…")and *"Māyiri mei to Purushottam var pāyo..."* (I have attained the supreme Godhead, Purushottam...")

* * *

Muktanand Swami kept the *kaupin* of Ramanand Swami as a memento and had its darshan everyday. Once when he was performing puia, Chaitanyanand Swami approached him to pay his respects. At that time Muktanand Swami gave him the *kaupin* for darshan, but Chaitanyanand Swami closed his eyes. When Swami asked for an explanation, Chaitanyanand Swami said, "I offer *pativrata* bhakti to Maharaj."

These words jolted Muktanand Swami and he threw the *kaupin* into the nearby fireplace. He felt unhappy at his own deficiency in offering bhakti to Maharaj, and so he composed the following kirtan:

"Chhāndike Shri Krishnadev aur ki jo karu sev,
Kāti dāro kar mero tikhi talvār se…"

"If I abandon the service of Shri Hari Krishnadev, and render the service to anyone else, please sever my hand with a sharp sword."

He then composed bhajans describing fidelity to and the glory of the manifest form of God. Thereafter, he explained the glory of the manifest form of Maharaj to many disciples of Ramanand Swami and cleared their doubts.

* * *

Once, Maharaj had organized a *shakotasv* in village Loya. On this occasion some devotees from the villages came for Maharaj's darshan, having heard about his glory. Maharaj himself was busy cooking vegetables and placing big vessels on the cooking fires. He was clad in a short loin cloth, his hands were smeared with turmeric powder and his whole body was perspiring. Seeing his shabby appearance, those devotees who had come there for darshan were annoyed and they wondered, "Can God be so ordinary?"

They were about to leave when Muktanand Swami saw them. He took them to one side and talked about the human and divine actions of God. He explained how God behaves like a human being when he is manifests in human form. With these words he reconciled the doubts in their minds and convinced them about the identity of Maharaj as God. In this way Muktanand Swami used to explain the divine glory of Maharaj to many devotees.

* * *

Muktanand Swami used to regard Maharaj with that same divine attitude. Once Maharaj picked up a small splinter in his hand and broke it into two pieces. Swami saw this and enquired, What sort of exploit is this?" He knew that freak gestures could be ascribed to mortals, but in a divine action there must be some supernatural element. Maharaj also could read his mind and had mercy on him and said that he had destroyed one cosmic world and had created another one. Swami was delighted to hear this. Muktanand Swami had taken a note of many such episodes.

He was a born artist, gifted with art, music, and literature. His artistic gifts developed during his term in the Margi Sect, and he progressed very much in this direction after joining Swaminarayan Sampraday. He used to compose lucid verses on subjects like the form and preaching of Maharaj. He even used to recite these verses with his sweet voice. Sometimes he even used to dance with ghugharus on his feet; while dancing he used to make beautiful designs on the floor with the help of his right

foot thumb. In this way, Swami used to offer respect to Maharaj and this shows the climax of his loving devotion for Maharaj. Many people were attracted towards him due to his versatile personality in general, and sweet voice and handsome figure, in particular. As a result of this he always used to cover his body with a piece of cloth and leave only the face uncovered. In the moonlight, his handsomeness blossomed fully.

Once when Maharaj asked Muktanand Swami about his strong point, he politely replied, "By your grace there is such quality in my tongue that whosoever listens to me, immediately turns to the worship of the Almighty; and his heart becomes soft like a flower, however hard hearted or ill-motivated he may be."

The famous poet Dalpatram has compared his flow of speech with the flow of the river Ganga.

He was an expert in diagnosis of diseases. Whenever, Maharaj was indisposed he used to send for Muktanand Swami for diagnosis. Swami who had the heart of a devotee could also recognize the divinity in the exploits and would pray to him to relieve himself from the disease for the sake of the devotees.

One event, which is an example of his tolerance, is noteworthy. His health was deteriorating. But he was ordered by Maharaj to constantly keep on writing religious literature. Swami who was engrossed in this work hardly ever cared for his body. Once Gopalanand Swami and Nityanand Swami came to his seat to enquire about his health. Swami was busy taking meals When Swami finished his meals Nityanand Swami took up some left out *khichdi* from Swami's plate as *prasad*. As he put it in the mouth there was a clatter of some pebbles in his mouth. He was angry and asked as to who gave such food to Swami. Nityanand Swami called Swami's attendant and reprimanded him, "How dare you give such food to the ailing sadhu? You must at least clean the grains before you cook." To this, the attendant who happened to be Swami's writer, replied, "If I am to engage myself in such jobs as cleaning, etc. when shall I write? So I cook the stuff which I get from the general store. I cannot do anything more." Hearing his insolent reply, Nityanand Swami called Anopamanand Swami and ordered him to cook and serve good stuff to Swami. When Nityanand Swami asked Swami for how long he had been tolerating such conditions, Swami replied that he always ate this type of meals. It was then that he realized that it was only Muktanand Swami who could tolerate such things.

He was full of motherly love. Once young sadhus were eating stale loaves in the kitchen at an odd hour because they were hungry. In those days, it was Maharaj's order that sadhus should take only one meal during the day; but student-sadhus were granted some concessions. The eyes of Swami and the sadhus met and the loaves from their hands dropped. They feared that Swami might reprimand them. Seeing this, Swami thought how is it that the loaves dropped from the hands of the sadhus on seeing me? Are they so much afraid of me? A sadhu should be like a mother. He turned back feeling sorry for it. He approached the sadhus with affection and enquired, "Is there anything left over today? Today, I am also hungry." The sadhus were happy to hear this and gave some pieces of loaves to Swami, and calm prevailed in everyone's heart. The sadhus thought that there was no cause to worry as Swami had also eaten with

them.

Swami's vow to strictly observe the orders of Maharaj was also exemplary. In those days, Maharaj used to issue different types of vartamans – moral restrictions. Once, when Muktanand Swami was on his usual round of rural tours, he received a circular from Maharaj that everyone was to remain alert as strict restrictions were soon to be imposed. On reading this circular, Swami began to contemplate about the severity of the restrictions. He began to drink the juice of crushed neem leaves in anticipation of the forthcoming restrictions. When Maharaj came to know about this, he was very happy about Swami's zeal to obey the orders.

However, it should be noted that there was hardly any rigidity in his behaviour. Even in the strict observation of the restrictions he could use his discretion according to the circumstances. Once Swami was touring Marwar. Here in those days the opponents of satsang were trying to harass the sadhus. The sadhus who lived on the alms, sometimes failed to procure any food and consequently they had to fast. Swami's group also had to fast for three days. On the fourth day, inspired by the Almighty and drawn by the fragrance of the sadhus, a Brahmin arrived there. Muktanand Swami preached to him in an excellent manner and as a result of that he was inspired. Knowing that the sadhus were hungry he arranged for *khichdi* to be cooked for them. In those days the sadhus had taken vows to abstain from sweet and oily food; so Swami had asked the Brahmin not to put ghee in the *khichdi*. After offering it to the deity, the sadhus sat down for their meals. When the *khichdi* was served in the bowl of Atmanand Swami, he sensed a slight smell of ghee. So he immediately shouted, "Don't touch it. It smells of ghee." With these words he got up. There was panic in the row. The sadhus who were starving for three days felt that food was snatched away almost from their lips. The Brahmin was also perplexed. He told Swami that he had not put any ghee in the *khichdi*. What he had done was that he had put some ghee in the plate which was offered to the deity. *Khichdi* from that plate was mixed with the rest of the *khichdi* and consequently, it smelled slightly of ghee.

Swami could see that to deprive starving sadhus of the food at this moment was like snatching away their very lives. Remembering Maharaj at this critical juncture, Swami took the decision and directed all the sadhus to go ahead with the meal, and assured them that if Maharaj would pass a note of censure, he would accept the responsibility. All the sadhus were happy. However, Atmanand Swami, who was a staunch observer of the vow, did not touch the food. When the touring sadhus met Maharaj and narrated the incident he was pleased with Swami and said, "Muktanand Swami's leniency is superior to Atmanand Swami's sacrifice, because Swami has saved the lives of the other sadhus." In this way, Muktanand Swami who was like the "Mother of Satang" emanated the fragrance of his virtues on many such occasions. Maharaj has praised Muktanand Swami many times in the Vachanamrut also, for example: "Muktanand Swami, ever since I saw him at Lojpur has been flourishing in faith and in love for God which have not worn out even today" (Vachanamrut, Sarangpur 3); "Muktanand Swami desires to please me and has implicit trust in me" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 24).

After Maharaj's departure to the Dham, Swami was upset. Maharaj had ordered him, you should continue your life-long work of writing scriptures and discourses till your last breath and that is my word left for you." (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 58). According to this instruction, Swami did not put his pen aside. He continued writing incessantly. Now that Maharaj was no longer physically present, who would take away the pen from Swami's hand? It was very necessary to do so because his body was getting emaciated.

Meanwhile, once it so happened that while writing, the pen dropped down from Swami's hand. It was then that Gopalanand Swami asked him to cry halt, and said that he had already obeyed Maharaj's instruction in its true spirit. Nityanand Swami gave him an assurance to undertake the task of finishing his text of religious discourses, which was half complete. Muktanand Swami was pleased and gave a rose garland to Nityanand Swami and said, "You have rendered true service to me." Muktanand Swami resolved to depart for Dham. He recommended to Acharya Raghuviriji Maharaj, Gopalanand Swami, etc., to take care of the Satsang. At the age of 72, on 26 July 1829 (Ashadh *vad* 11, Samvat 1886), in the presence of all the sadhus and devotees, chanting devotional songs, he left for Dham to serve Maharaj.

His literary contributions comprise 7 volumes in Sanskrit and 23 volumes in Gujarati and Hindi.

His Sanskrit works include: (1) Brahma Sutra Bhashya, (2) Bhagvat Dashambhashyatika, (3) Nirnay Panchak and (4) Satsangijivan Mahatmya, and others.

In Gujarati and Hindi he composed many verses in awide variety of poetic metres: *doha, chopai, dhol, prabhatiya, godi, garbi, sameri* and others. In these verses he described the form of Maharaj, universal teachings, attributes, the glory of satsang and other inspiring messages.

He also composed some verses and books for women devotees. Such works include *Rukshmini Vivah, Sati Gita,* wedding songs and verses for Holi.

Uddhav Gita and *Mukund Bavani* are two of his famous works composed in Gujarati. Each of his compositions flowed from his devoted heart radiating spiritual fragrance.

KIRTAN

Rag: Kafi

Pad 1

Anubhavi ānandmā brahmarasnā bhogi re,
Jivanmukta Jogiā antar arogi re...Anu.
Je shikhe je sāmbhale triputine tāne re,
Mananu krutya man lagi asatya māne re...Anu.
Jyā lagi jag vistaryo mrugtrushna pāni re,
Temā moh na pame mahāmuni swapnu pramāni re...Anu.
Je vade ā jakt chhe tene koi na jāne re,
Muktānand kahe gurumukhi te, sukhadā māne re...Anu.

Pad 2

Anubhavi ne āpadā antarthi bhāgi re,
Antarjami olakhyā tyā lagani lāgi re..... Anu.
Urmi ne tran ishanā ahantāne tyāgi re,
Chaud lok Vaikunth lagi māyāni pāgi re,
Tethi anubhavi alagā rahe tray tāp āgi re..... Anu
Ashtasiddhi nav nidhi te nirmālya tyāgi re,
Muktānand kahe gurumukhi rahe Ramrāgi re..... Anu.

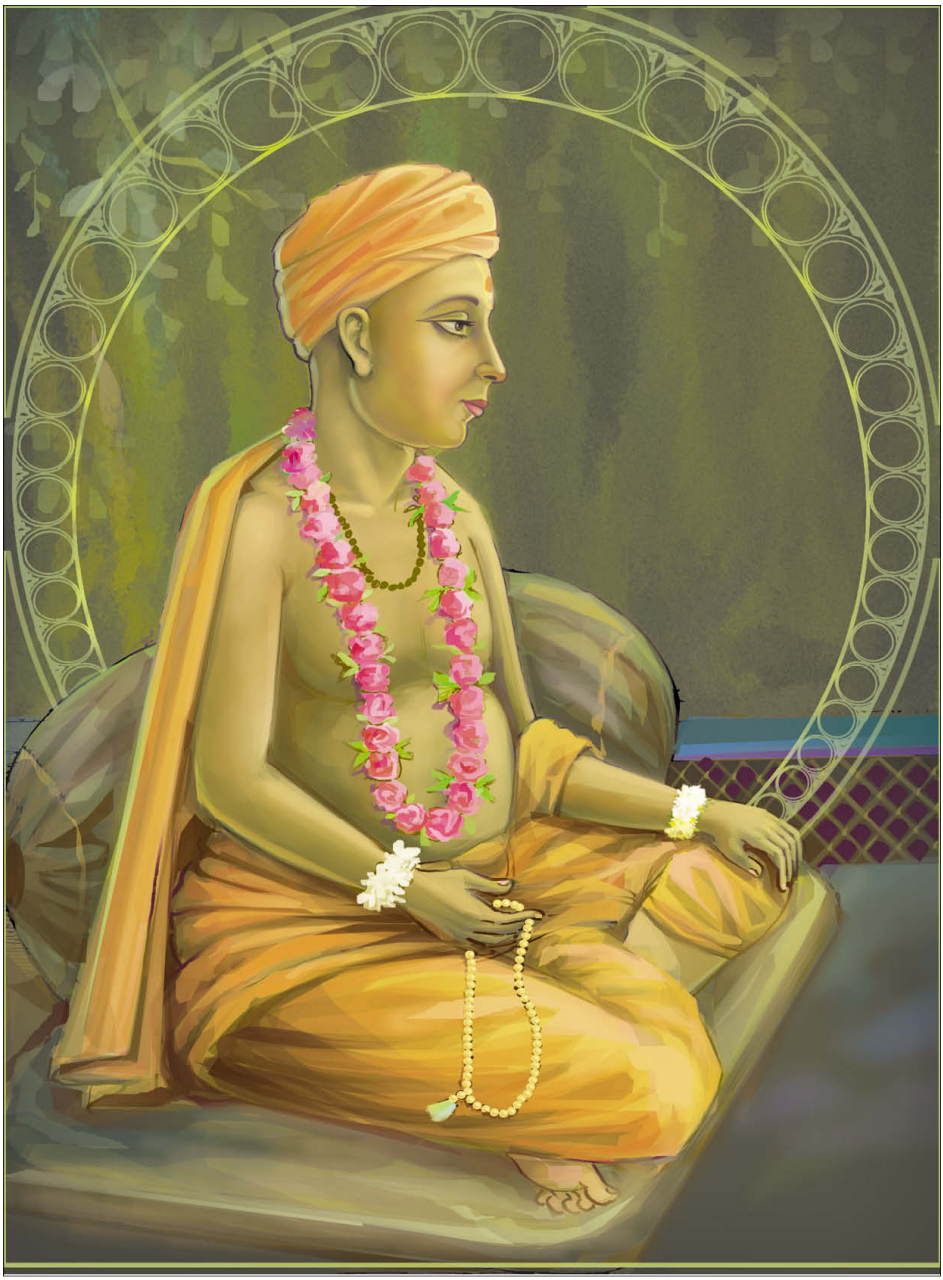
Pad 3

Anubhavine antare rahe Rām vās re,
Je bole te sāmbhale drashti prakāshe re.....Anu.
Jyā jue tyā Ramji biju na bhāse re,
Bhāt dekhi bhule nahi anubhav ujāse re.....Anu.
Kesari kerā gandhthi kari koti trāse re,
Tem ātmānā udyotthi ajnān nāse re..... Anu.
Hu tale Hari dhunkadā te talāy dāse re,
Muktānand mahā santne prabhu pragat pāse re.... Anu.

Pad 4

Anubhavi ānandmā govind gāve re,
Prit kari Parabrahma shu bhavmā na āve re.....Anu.
Marjivāne mārge jan koik jāve re,
pehlu parthe mot te muktāphal pāve re..... Anu.
Vege vehetā vārimā pratibimb na bhāse re,
Tem dagmage dil jyā lagi nav Brahma prakāshe re....Anu.
Brahma thai Parabrahmane juve te jāne re,
Evā Jivanmukta jananā guna Veda vakhāne re..... Anu.
Kaya maya kood chhe jem dhoom chhaya re,
Muktānand kahe gurumukhimā pad samāyā re..... Anu

3. Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami Embodiment of Renunciation



“Why have you come here? Why didn’t you go to Loj?”

"Swami, since you are lodging here, why should I wander elsewhere?"

"Hadn't I issued an instruction that everyone should go to Loj for the darshan of Varni? He is a great Yogi and a glorious personality."

"How great is he? Is he like Sukhanand..... Raghunathdas..... Ramdas..... Mukunddas?"

"No, greater than all of them," replied Swami with a smile.

"Like you?" suddenly the devotee could not but resist asking.

"He is greater than me also," Swami firmly replied. He explained the infinite glory of Varni to this new devotee, Lalji, and ordered him to go to Loj.

From Bhuj, Ramanand Swami had issued an instruction for all his devotees to go to Loj. But Lalji Bhakta who had undivided fidelity to his guru, had ignored the instruction. Repenting in the heart of his hearts, he arrived at Loj and met Varni with a love-soaked heart, and felt gratified. On seeing the devotee, Varni also blessed him as if they were related from many births. He blessed him that he would renounce the world like Shukji. As his spiritual eyes opened, Lalji Bhakta could discern the divine identity of Varni, and his devotion towards Varni grew stronger.

Lalji Bhakta was born on the auspicious day of Vasant Panchmi in the Samvat year 1822 (15 January 1766), at Shekhpat, near Jamnagar. His father was Rambhai Suthar and mother was Amritba. They were graced with a son by the blessings of Atmanand Swami. From childhood he displayed the signs of a devotee and everyone could notice that. Those who are attached to God distinguish themselves from others in this world by their strength of the samskaras of the previous birth; but it is their destiny which drags them to the flow of *maya*. Parents of Lalji Bhakta made him enter into wedlock at a very young age. The devotee, too, accepted his ancestral business of carpentry. During his leisure hours he tried to divert his attention to holy sessions of discourses and devotion.

He was so fond of holy discourses and discussions that he met Mulji Sharma of Bhadra everyday. After finishing his work, at night, Lalji Bhakta would set off from Shekhpat and would reach a mandir of Mahadev situated between Shekhpat and Bhadra. Mulji Sharma would also arrive there on foot. Both of them would discuss the glory of God for the whole night and would return, at dawn, to their respective villages. The distance between Bhadra and Shekhpat is seven long miles. Both of them walked three and half miles and covered the same distance on return journey. Such was their committment to the holy discourses.

The influence of Ramanand Swami began to increase after the death of Atmanand Swami, who was a popular favourite in this region. Hearing the description of his virtues, Lalji Bhakta and Mulji Bhakta came for his darshan. Realizing spiritual attainment of Swami both of them became his followers. Swami, too, gave them a gurumantra and tied the Vaishnavi kanthi round their neck. Gradually it so happened that Lalji was drawn more towards Swami and he requested Swami, "O Lord! Please keep me at your feet." The omniscient Swami who was delighted to hear this, delayed his expression and said, "We shall call you at the right moment." As the days passed, this devotee grew more and more attached to Swami and lost his interest from worldly

affairs. Meanwhile, he had an encounter with Varni as a result of Swami's orders and he developed an attachment for Varni.

During his period of married life, he had begotten two sons, Madhavji and Kanji. The devotee remained busy with his worship and his wife Kanku looked after the household. They all lived a happy life.

After departure of Ramanand Swami, Maharaj used to move from village to village and fufill the desires of the devotees. Once Maharaj arrived at Bhadra. Here devotees of Halar region had assembled. From Shekhpat, Bhakta Lalji had also come. Accompanied by the group of devotees, Maharaj reached the banks of the river Und which flowed near Bhadra. Both the banks of the river were overflowing. The water in the river stretched to both the banks. Seeing the river flooded with water, Maharaj resolved for a boating excursion. Maharaj asked Lalji Bhakta to make a small boat. It was a problem for Lalji Bhakta to make a boat without tools and materials.

But Maharaj was determined to cross the river; so he ordered him to bring a piece of coarse cloth. Lalji, who had faith in the words of Maharaj obeyed the order. Everyone was eager to see what Maharaj would do. Would that piece of cloth float on the water? And to the surprise of everyone present, Maharaj floated that piece of cloth and sat down on it. All the devotees were wonderstruck and felt as if they were watching a dream. Then obeying the orders of Maharaj, Mulji Sharma, Lalji Bhakta, Ratna Bhagat and Dosa Bhagat also sat down on that piece of cloth. According to the wishes of Maharaj that piece began to move on the water and soon they reached the opposite bank. Seeing such miraculous surprise, Lalji Bhakta and other devotees were convinced of the real divine identity of Maharaj.

In the Samvat year 1860, Maharaj came to Shekhpat to honour the invitation of Lalji Bhakta. Here, Maharaj celebrated the festival of Vasant Panchami and fulfilled the desires of Lalji Bhakta. Thereafter, Maharaj resolved to go to Kutch and told Lalji Bhakta, "I wish to go to Kutch so find a good guide like you." The devotee thought. "Since Maharaj has asked for guide like myself, there must be some meaning in it. Why search for someone else? Why not I be that guide? When will I get the benefit again for rendering such service to Maharaj?" And with this thought Lalji Bhakta gladly informed Maharaj, "What if I come with you as a guide?" Maharaj replied, "Nothing like it! I am very glad." With these what words Maharaj began the preparations to move.

Lalji Bhakta had an idea about the difficult route of Kutch and the hardships experienced on the route. So he equipped himself accordingly; and took some food and water. He also took some money so that it would be useful if there was a contingency to buy something. He hid these coins in the shoes, lest thieves should take them away. He did not breathe a word about this to Maharaj.

On their way to Kutch, they met a beggar. Maharaj heard his pleadings and made Lalji Bhakta give away all the food. Further up, they had an encounter with robbers. They searched both of them, but could not find anything. Seeing them disappointed, Maharaj himself beckoned them and said, "You are not clever in your own art. Search the shoes of this devotee." Seeing such a generous victim, the robbers were surprised

but they were unaware that they had an encounter with the Almighty himself. Taking away all the twelve coins, the robbers went away on their way. Lalji Bhakta felt embarrassed. In fact, he was worried only about Maharaj as to what he would now offer to Maharaj for meals. Maharaj could read his thoughts and said, “You were to encounter a great danger which I have averted.” Moving further up, they met a thirsty sadhu. Maharaj gave away all the water to him. In this way, Maharaj relieved Lalji Bhakta of all the worldly things and made him dependent only on Maharaj himself. In the midst of the desert, Lalji Bhakta was thirsty. Without a drop of water, his throat went dry. At this juncture, Maharaj showed him an oasis in the desert and asked him to dig the water out. While Lalji Bhakta tasted the water he found it sweet. He offered it to Maharaj and quenched his own thirst, too, and went ahead. But soon he returned to reconcile his doubt and tasted the water again, and found it salty in taste instead of sweet. He was convinced that in the marshy land of the desert, Maharaj had worked a miracle for him. After some time they met two divine persons on their way. They bowed to Maharaj and went ahead.

After covering some more distance Maharaj had a halt at a lake for some rest. The only shade in the vicinity was that of a babul tree. Lalji Bhakta cleared the place and made arrangements for Maharaj to sleep. Since Maharaj was barefooted many thorns had pricked his feet. When Lalji Bhakta took his lotus feet into his hands to remove the thorns, he saw sixteen divine marks in the feet. His joy knew no bounds. He kept on talking with Maharaj and simultaneously, slowly, removed the thorns. During the course of conversation, he asked Maharaj about the persons who had met them on the way. Replying to his query Maharaj said, “The first sadhu who met us was Ramanand Swami and the two divine persons who met us later on were cosmic gods.”

After all the thorns were removed, they resumed their journey and reached the limits of village Adhoi.

Here Maharaj said, “l feel hungry. Bring me some food.” Lalji Bhakta was annoyed and said, “You made me give away the food we had and the money, too. Now what should I bring?” In this village there lived a Lohana devotee. So Maharaj suggested to bring some food from his place But Lalji Bhakta said, “This is the village of my in-laws. Everyone knows me here so how can I beg here?”

“What if I transform you so that no one would recognize you?” said Maharaj, with tongue in cheek. “That would be very nice,” was the instant reaction of the devout devotee, but then he became anxious to know what Maharaj would do.

The Almighty is one who would do something totally unexpected and unanticipated. Maharaj was pleased with Lalji Bhakta as he came through the tests taken by him to prove his spiritual aspiration. So he shaved off the moustache and the bunch of locks on his head. He also made him change his clothes and put on a kaupeen and a small garment round his waist. He also made him put on a cap on his head. His appearance changed completely. Now, only his name remained to be changed. So Maharaj gave him the gurumantra, initiated him there and then, and named him ‘Nishkulanand’ – one who has abandoned his family. As if these tests were not enough, Maharaj ordered him to go for begging food at the place of his in-laws.

Nishkulanand went ahead chanting the slogan of 'Narayan Hare, Sachhidanand Prabhu', and arrived at the place of his in-laws. His wife came out and saw her own husband in the dress of an ascetic. She rushed to her mother and told her about it. The mother advised her to go and stand in front of him along with her two children. She felt this would move his heart; but here was a soul who had renounced everything. He had changed his heart completely. He merely uttered these words, "Just as termites cannot affect the fire, I, too, remain detached from you. I have come only because Maharaj is here, and if you wish to be redeemed, render him some service by giving some food for him." His wife, who knew the detached attitude of her husband, did not utter a word and gave him fresh hot loaves, ghee and pickle. Maharaj consumed all these with pleasure. He heard the whole story and was pleased with Swami's detached attitude.

Later on, when other members of his family came to persuade him he simply explained to them about his previous births and said, "l belong to eternity, and what you say is a mere botheration for me." Realizing his firm attitude and deep detachment they all went away. Here Maharaj ordered him to compose a volume titled 'Yamdanda' But Lalji asked as to how he could write anything without experience. So Maharaj made him see the very 'Yamlok' and the tortures inflicted there. He began to write the book. After the tour of Kutch was over, both of them arrived at Gadhpur. Here he became more and more fond of Maharaj as a result of the company of Muktanand Swami. Thereafter, Maharaj gave him wonderful darshan in samadhi. He then composed a verse of this divine vision: *'Sahajanand Hari, pragat thayā Sahajanand Hari...'*

After some years, once again, members of his family bothered him. His wife and two sons came to take him back. It was then that Swami talked with the elder son, Madhavji, and inspired him to become an ascetic and renounce the world for the Almighty who had manifested himself. As a result of impressions of his past spiritual endeavours, Madhavji was inspired and was initiated. After naming him as Govindanand, Gopalanand Swami took him to Maharaj who blessed him after introduction. Maharaj said, "He is as bold as his father." Govindanand Swami followed the footsteps of his father, became an able sadhu and observed celibacy in its fullest spirit.

Once Maharaj asked Swami to go and address an assembly of females. But the sadhus were under orders of Maharaj to shun women and wealth in the eightfold way. So, he did not go to the assembly. Later on, when Maharaj asked for an explanation, he politely replied that he was prepared to be punished for disobedience but was not ready to deviate from the rules of the ascetics by addressing a female assembly. Seeing his firm attitude for celibacy, Maharaj was pleased, as only such sadhus can emancipate themselves and the society.

There was firm renunciation rooted in his heart. Once Nishkulanand Swami went to Vadodara at the instance of Gopalanand Swami. As a matter of fact, he used to avoid going to big cities because they offered more chances of sensual pleasures. Gopalanand Swami had arranged for a special meal, consisting of a preparation of rice cooked in

sweet milk. Nishkulanand Swami went to the kitchen and saw pots filled with milk. Seeing this, he began to prepare for his departure from this place. Gopalanand Swami came to know about that and he rushed to Swami in order to enquire about the reason of his departure. Nishkulanand Swami replied that how could anyone, who had renounced the world, stay where milk was overflowing. It was only when Gopalanand Swami ordered to pour away the milk, and assured him of simple meals, that Nishkulanand Swami agreed to stay back.

Once Nishkulanand Swami was busy constructing a small tank near the well at Kariyani. Then Maharaj was at Kariyani. It was the month of Aso, in the Samvat year 1877. Just at that time, Gopalanand Swami arrived there for the darshan of Maharaj Maharaj was pleased and led him to Akshar Ordi, holding his hand. Nishkulanand Swami could notice that Maharaj wanted to confide a secret to Gopalanand Swami; so he, too, followed them. But Maharaj sent him back and asked him to continue the work of constructing the tank and closed the door behind him. But how could Nishkulanand Swami miss such an opportunity. He put his ears to the cracks in the doors. Maharaj confided to Gopalanand Swami about the six-fold purpose of his manifestation and the difference between avatar and avatari. This reminded Nishkulanand Swami of the words of Ramanand Swami, regarding the glory of Maharaj, and he could clearly understand the principle of supreme worship; hased on which he wrote a wonderful book – *Purushottam Charitra* – explaining the supreme identity of Maharaj.

Once Maharaj said in the assembly that he wanted to appoint Nishkulanand Swami as the Mahant of Gadhada Mandir. When he came to know about this, he was upset. From Gadhada he went away to a nearby village, Gadhali. He felt that if he remained in Gadhada, Maharaj would certainly appoint him as Mahant and he found that appointment to be onerous. After some time, Maharaj enquired of his whereabouts and called him back from Gadhali. When Maharaj enquired about his sudden disappearance, he politely replied, “What would happen if a heavy weight fell on a small mouse? Obviously it would be crushed under it. Similarly, if I were made responsible for all the administration I would spiritually degenerate.” It was only when Maharaj assured him that he would not be made a Mahant that he decided to remain there quietly; so strong was his attitude of renunciation.

This was the reason why he had decided to settle at Dholera. This remote village on the sea-shore was a dull and dry place, devoid of all attractions and luxuries. Moreover, the Mahant of the village mandir, Adbhutanand Swami, was a man with a taste for simple living; so Swami liked this place.

It was a noteworthy characteristic of Swami’s personality that along with the fragrance of his saintliness he was an expert in the fields of arts, crafts and literature. He was a good sculptor, too. The dome-arches and the framework of the mandir doors at Dholera are excellent examples of Swami’s master craftsmanship. Besides that, there are several other artistic achievements, small as well as big, to the credit of Swami. It was he who had constructed the Akshar Ordi in Gadhada. His masterpiece, which will long be remembered, was a swing which he made at Vartal on the occasion of Fuldol – the festival of colours. It contained twelve doors, all of them delicately engraved. At

each door, Maharaj gave divine darshan in different forms.

The climate of Dholera did not suit Swami. He suffered from skin rashes. He observed strict dietary restrictions, and ate only loaves and buttermilk, yet he did not get any relief from the disease. Seeing his traumatic condition, all the sadhus and the devotees of the mandir began to chant a prayer to Maharaj for his well-being. When he came to know about this, he called them and said, "I have got to bear the sufferings. If I do not complete my quota of destined suffering, I'll have to take another birth in order to complete it. You cannot share my suffering. Moreover, it is not fair to pray to Maharaj for relief of bodily pains. So if you wish me well, stop the prayer and let me suffer till Maharaj desires it to be so." Everyone was surprised to see that he was true to himself and sincere in his worship.

In the Samvat year 1904, when he was 82, Swami left his mortal form at the mandir of Dholera and joined the service of Maharaj in Akshardham.

Nishkulanand Swami, who had renounced the world at a very late age had not studied Sanskrit. But he possessed a good knowledge of Gujarati and wide experience of the shastras, which is reflected in his contributions made in Gujarati in the form of invaluable literature. He could do this due to the grace of Maharaj. He continued his literary activity till his his last breath. In his literary works, we find effective use of popularly established analogies and anecdotes. He constantly maintained lucidity and a deep level of meaning in his works. His books and verses on the preachings of renunciation, detachment, devotion, glory, dharma and other subjects form a rich body of literature in the Sampraday. His text, Bhaktachintamani, which was written during Maharaj's life-time, is widely read even today. In all, he wrote 23 books, include: (1) Bhaktachintamani, (2) Yamdand, (3) Sarsiddhi, (4) Vachanvidhi. (5) Haribal Gita, (6) Dhirajakhyan, (7) Snehgita, (8) Purushottam Prakash, (9) Bhaktinidhi, (10) Chosath Padi.

These verses are written in simple Gujarati and contain apt analogies from scriptures, and a thorough analysis of every subject. His verses contain, in particular, an excellent treatment of topics like the nature of the glory of a God-realized sadhu. Nishkulanand Swami, who was a friend of Gunatitanand Swami and knew the inner heart of Shriji Maharaj, has given philosophical insights through his songs.

Some examples of his devotional songs are given below.

Rag: Dhol

Verse 1

Sant vinā re sāchi kon kahe, sārā sukhni vāt;
Dayā rahi chhe jenā dilmā, nāthi ghatmā ghāt...Sant...
Jem jananine haiye het chhe, sadā sutne sāth;
Tem sant vachan katu kahe, āpava āpano rang...Sant...
Jāno sant sagā chhe sahunā, jiva jarur jāno;
Nishkulānand nirbhay kare, āpe pad nirvān...Sant...

Verse 2

Anup santne āpu upmā, evu nathi jo ek;
Joi joi joyu mei jivamā, kari undo vivek...Anup...
Swarg mrutyu pātālmā, shodhe nāve santne tol;
Dhithhā sunyā te doshe bharyā,
sant ati amal amol...Anup...
Sāte drashtānte sādhu suchvi, kahe kavijan koi;
Sare sār temā shodhatā, sant sam nahi soi...Anup...
Jevā e sant kahie shiromani, tevā Hari sau shirmod;
Nishkulānand nihālta, na jade e beni jod...Anup...

Verse 3

Sukhi karyā re jan jaktamā, Prabhu pragati ā vār;
Nivāsi karyā Brahmam'olnā, aganit nar-nār...Sukhi...
Je sukh agam aj ishne, sur sureshne soi;
Te sukh didhu chhe dāsne, je sukh na pame koi...Sukhi...
Dhami vina re eh dhāmnu, kon sukhnu denar;
Māte āpe āvi āpiyu, akhand sukh apār...Sukhi...
Eh sukhthi je sukhiyā thayā, rahyā dukh tethi dur;
Nishkulānand nirbhay thai, rahyā Harine hajur..Sukhi.

Verse 4

Bhāgya jāgya re āj jānava, koti thayā kalyān;
Udhāro na rahyo ehano,
pāmyā Prabhu pragat pramān...Bhāgya...
Anāthpanānu m'enu utaryu, sadā thaya sanāth;
Dar na rahyo bijā devano, grahyo Harie hāth.....Bhāgya...
Kangālpanu ke'vā na rahyu, sadā manānu sukh;
Masti āvi re ati angmā, dur palānā dukh...Bhāgya...
Ansamjan algi thai, sami samajāni vāt;
Pāmpalā sarve parā palyā,
malyā Shri Hari sākshāt...Bhāgya...
Kasar na rahi koi vātni, pāmyā prabhu pragat prasang;
Khot-matine khātya thai,
rahi gayo chhe rang.....Bhāgya...
Bhudhar malatā bhalu thayu, fero fāvyo ā vār;
Sukh tani simā shi kahu, mane mod apār.....Bhāgya...
Āj ānand vadhāmanā, haiye harakh na māy;
Amalati vāt te āvi mali, shi kahu sukh ni simāy...Bhāgya...
Āj amrut ni heli thai, rahi nahi kāi khot;
Ek kalyānnu kyā rahyu, thayā kalyan kot...Bhāgya...
Rānkpanu to rahyu nahi, koi mā kesho kangāl;
Nirdhaniyā to ame nathi, mahā malyo chhe māl... Bhāgya...
Kon jāne ā kem thayu, āvyu anchintavyu sukh;

Dhālo alaukik dhali gayo,
malyā Hari mukho mukh...Bhāgya...
Dhanya dhanya avsar ājno, jemā maliyā Mahārāj;
Nishkulānand danko jitano, vāgi gayo chhe āj..... Bhāgya

4. Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj

Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj was the fourth son of Ichchharam Pande, the younger brother of Shriji Maharaj. He was born at village Amalia, in Uttar Pradesh, on 2 March

1812 (Fagun *vad* 4, Samvat 1868). From his very childhood he displayed a serene aptitude. He first met Maharaj in 1824 (Samvat 1880) when he was 12 years old.

Proximity to Maharaj helped him to develop divine qualities. He was fond of simplicity in life. Even in the ritual performances he attached more importance to the sincerity of heart rather than to the costly items. He used to be overwhelmed while performing the puja. He used to seek advice of Gopalanand Swami in all religious matters and after his departure, according to his instructions, he used to consult Mool Aksharmurti Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami. He was always very keen to observe the tenets.

He had exceptional veneration for Maharaj. Once Maharaj celebrated the festival of Hutasani at Gadhada. When Maharaj was about to play with colours in the company of other followers, suddenly Raghuvirji Maharaj appeared on the scene, with a pot full of colour, with an intention to pour it on Maharaj – Maharaj tried to resist him by holding his hand but Raghuvirji Maharaj poured it all on Maharaj. Maharaj then said with a smile, "After all, you are Hindustani and it is a tradition in Hindustan (Mother India) to indulge freely in the play with colours and therefore, they pour it on one another." And with these words Maharaj added humour to the atmosphere.

Acharya's wife, Virajadevi, too, was full of exceptional veneration for Maharaj. She always used to attend the female assembly to listen to the discourses of Maharaj. Knowing her devotion, Maharaj, too, granted her happiness. Once it so happened that according to routine when she prepared the full dish, Maharaj came and ate away the dish, washed his hands and even took the mukhvas. It was when he disappeared, thereafter, that Virajadevi was reminded of the fact that Maharaj was no longer physically among them but had come to eat the dish in the divine form.

Once Raghuvirji Maharaj went for an excursion on the banks of the river Mahi. Here he entered the waters for ablutions. As the waters were flowing with a tremendous force, he was swept off his feet; it was at that moment that Maharaj appeared in the divine form and arranged for a boat and rescued him. In this way, Maharaj always protected him.

He was highly service-minded. Once one of the sadhus was suffering from fever. After fasting for five days he developed some inclination to eat and consequently, ordered the attendant to bring something for him. It was late night and no cooking materials or flour was available. So the attendant made up his mind to go to the kitchen of Acharya Maharaj. When he narrated his difficulty about the ailing sadhu, Acharya Maharaj sympathized with him and asked him what he could do with only flour, without any cooking implements. And, with these words, he offered to cook a, loaf himself; he changed his clothes, donned a silk loin cloth, lighted the fire and cooked a spicy and light loaf, which an ailing person can easily digest, and then fed the sadhu.

On the occasion of a festival in Vartal, many sadhus had come there. One of them suddenly developed severe stomach ache. Acharya Maharaj came to know about this. Accompanied by two of his attendants he went to the seat of the ailing sadhu. He touched that position of the stomach where severe ache had developed and

immediately the sadhu felt relieved. In this way, by the grace of Maharaj, Acharya Maharaj cured the sadhu.

Even the senior sadgurus recognized his glory. On one occasion *sadgurus* like Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and others accompanied Acharya Maharaj to Surat. Here a Parsi gentleman, Aradesharji, respected the sadhus but he had little regard for Acharya Maharaj. So the sadhus thought that since Aradesharji is a good devotee it would be desirable if he realized glory of Raghuvirji Maharaj. It so happened that Gopalanand Swami sent Sadhu Keshavjivandasji into samadhi. Aradesharji examined the pulse of the sadhu but found that it had stopped. Three days passed in this way; so when Aradesharji requested Swami to awaken the sadhu from the samadhi, Swami asked him to request Raghuvirji Maharaj to do this. When Acharya Maharaj entered the assembly, Aradesharji requested him. So he addressed him by his name and immediately he responded. The sadhu then narrated that he had entered the state of trance and Maharaj had conveyed his Jai Swaminarayan to everyone; meanwhile, Raghuvirji Maharaj awakened him. And with this Aradesharji realized the glory of Raghuvirji Maharaj.

Although he was well off he was modest by temperament. He had a forgiving nature. Once a group of sadhus had gone to Mahelav and sang of Maharaj's glory.

"Mat panthne māthe mekh māri, lidhā jan chhodāvi jo,
Mundya kaik guru bhekh pādyā mahantne godvi jo...
Rāje Gadhpur."

The Gosai, who was in his palatial Haveli adjoining the mandir, heard this. As his anger had shot up he attacked the mandir. The young sadhus escaped from the scene, but one elderly sadhu did not move. He was beaten so severely that he died on the spot.

When this news reached Vartal, Nityanand Swami asked one hundred armed guards to go to Mahelav and cut the Gosai to size. But when Raghuvirji Maharaj came to know about this, he persuaded everyone not to take revenge. He said that Maharaj would do us a good turn. Meanwhile, the news of the sadhu's death reached the Government and the Gosai was about to be punished for his crime. All the Vaishnavas assembled together, came to Acharya Maharaj, offered their apology to Maharaj and requested him to procure the release of the Gosai. Acharya Maharaj immediately withdrew his complaint and saved the Gosai from punishment.

Such a gem of an Acharya, Raghuvirji Maharaj, was totally detached. He used his wealth for the benefit of the satsang. When in the Samvat year 1911, Gunatitanand Swami came to Vartal on the occasion of Hari Jayanti, Acharya Maharaj said, "This time we have received a considerable amount by way of gift-offerings, so let us arrange for a session of holy discourses on Satsangijivan," and declared that he would bear the entire burden of boarding expenses of all the devotees, for a period of four months. Swami was pleased to hear this and said, "Alright, this proposal is appropriate on your part. What else could you do with so much wealth? Since Maharaj has appointed you as Acharya it is your duty to promote, maintain and expand the Satsang."

Swami returned to Vartal via Junagadh for this occasion. A large gathering was

expected on this occasion and Gomti lake was empty, there was no water in it. So Acharya Maharaj requested Swami: “Swami, if you so desire, Gomti would be full of water.” On the same afternoon there was a heavy shower and Gomti lake was overflowing with water.

Senior sadhus and devotees arrived from various places. According to the orders of Acharya Maharaj, Swami used to talk about the Purushottam identity of Shriji Maharaj, on abandonment of sensual pleasures and on the process of being one with Akshar. The talks were held during the interval between shangar and mangala aaratis, and after the morning session of holy discourses. Some people felt jealous of Swami’s popular discourses, and they made arrangements for holy story sessions to be followed by the discourses of Shuk Muni. But most of the people found Shuk Muni’s discourses uninteresting as they were pedantic and delivered in a low tone. It was then that Shriji Maharaj appeared in a divine form before Acharya Maharaj and told him to make Gunatitanand Swami deliver discourses, since he was kept there for that purpose; or else, he should be allowed to go to Junagadh. So Acharya Maharaj told everyone in the assembly, “As long as this session lasts, Gunatitanand Swami will deliver discourses and those who do not find this arrangement suitable may go away to the villages.” In this way, he himself took, and made others take, the rare advantage of Swami’s company.

Once during the course of a holy discourse, Raghuvirji asked a question to Swami’ “Who is Akshar?” Swami replied, “The one who is followed by many people, whose talks remove the ignorance of the souls and enlighten the feeling of Brahman and who is totally convinced about the fact that Shriji Maharaj is the Supreme Godhead, should be recognized as Akshar.” At this juncture, inspired by Swami, Raghuvirji Maharaj instructed Achintyanand Brahmachari to compose a volume containing the divine exploits and the supreme glory of Shriji Maharaj. This book was entitled Harililakalpataru.

After some time, he became a widower. Many people tried to persuade him to marry again. But he resolved to observe total celibacy inspired by Swami. However, he was restless at heart with a thought that unless all the complexes melt away, real happiness was difficult to obtain. It so happened during those days that he and Swami were travelling together in a coach. When he offered sweets to Swami, Swami remarked, “Five hundred *paramhansas* are holding me by my throat and telling me, ‘It is poison, don’t eat it.’ ” Hearing this, Raghuvirji Maharaj said, “If you behave like this, what will be our plight?” Swami replied, “Hand over the seat to Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj, become a pilgrim and come to Junagadh. I should not be addressed as Gunatitanand if I do not melt away your complexes.” Therefore, he went to Junagadh every year to remain in the company of Swami. But many a time when he was on his way to Junagadh via Gadhada, the sadhus of Gadhada would detain him purposefully at Gadhada. Then, at Junagadh, Swami would pray to Shriji Maharaj and as a result of that Shriji Maharaj himself would appear before the Acharya and convey to him. “Go to Junagadh at once. Swami is waiting for you there” In this way, Swami used to convey to Acharya Maharaj many a time through a prayer to Shriji Maharaj, but would

never say a word personally.

Once during the course of an excursion, Acharya Maharaj asked Swami, “Swami! How could eternal peace prevail in the heart?” Swami then replied, “The calf would be happy when it would attach itself to the udder of the cow, and would not derive happiness from any other portion of her body. Similarly, this satsang, *murti*s, scriptures, Acharya, etc. comprise the body of Maharaj, but the God-realized Sadhu is like the udder of the cow and, therefore, eternal peace would come only if you attach yourself to him.”

Thereafter, in the Samvat year 1917, Acharya Maharaj handed over the seat to Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj, and reached Junagadh on foot with only one attendant. Here his routine was to attend the holy story session after *mangala arti*. After shangar aarati he would return to his lodging, quickly cook *khichdi* or chapatti and *dal* and then return to the session once again. At the time of *rajbhog arti*, he would go back for lunch. In the afternoon he avoided siesta and attended the discourses session. In this way, as he remained faithfully in the company of Swami, discarding indolence, sleep and, taste. Swami melted away his complexes and made him gunatit, too. It was for this reason that Swami used to say, “In the whole of Vartal, only Raghuvirji Maharaj recognized me properly.” It was his firm conviction that Swami was Akshar-Brahman incarnate. On 21 January 1863 (Maha *sud* 2, Samvat 1919), he abandoned his mortal frame and left for Akshardham. When he left his mortal frame, Swami fell ill; such was Swami’s affection for him. Many a time, Swami used to say that two crore people worshipped the Almighty then. This number would go up to ten crores provided there were two Acharyas like Raghuvirji and one ruler like King Gaya. Maharaj also used to say, “There is no one in the Dharmakul who can match Raghuvirji. He is unique.” His spiritual state and way of living were unparallelled and his style of renunciation resembled that of Maharaj.

He remained Acharya for a period of thirty seven years. As he had no son he adopted Bhagvatprasadji, who was the son of his younger brother Hadrinath, and made him heir to the throne.

He was a patron of literature and had composed the following books:

(1) Harililakalpataru, (2) Explanation of Sarvamangal Stotra, (3) Commentary on Shikshapatri and (4) Explanation of Janmangal Stotra.

The installation ceremony of the *murti*s in the following mandirs was performed at his auspicious hands: Dwarkadhish in Vartal, Harikrishna Maharaj and Revati Baldev in Gadhada, Harikrishna Maharaj in Junagadh, Dholera and Khambat, Narayanmuni and Radha-Krishna in Surat, Harikrishna Maharaj and Golokvihari in Mumbai, Bharuch, Manavadar, Una, Buranpur and others.

Raghuvirji Maharaj was faithful in his observance of dharma and was an exemplary devotee of Shriji Maharaj.

5. Bhaktaraj Kushalkunvarba

"In this way the Lord kidnapped Rukmani..." and with these words of the Purani the clever queen, who was listening to the holy story with rapt attention, started and heard

a voice rising from her heart that the only way to liberation was to meet the Almighty face to face. The queen conveyed her thoughts to the Purani also, “Even if you keep on telling the story and I keep on listening to it the whole thing is of no benefit. Our liberation could come through only when the Almighty himself grasps our wrist, just as he did with Rukmani...”

The Brahmin looked up from his holy book and nodded in agreement. This queen was Kushalkunvarba of Dharampur. In the beautiful land of Gujarat, Mahida Rajput Kesarisinh of village Dharmaj had two children, Prince Umedsinh and Princess Kushalkunvar. From childhood, the princess displayed an aptitude for religion. Worship and service of God were an integral part of Kushalkunvarba’s life. When she came of age, her father got her married with a Prince named Somdev, who belonged to the Sisodia family of Dharmapur, whose family deity was the Sun God. Her father gave a generous dowry in marriage. Soon a son – Rupdevji – was born to her and after some years Rupdevji, too, had a son – Vijaydevji. But Somdev and Rupdev died untimely death and consequently, Kushalkunvarba had to accept the responsibility of running the administration. The queen, who was religious-minded, wanted to remain away from this worldly responsibility and she therefore, appointed the young grandson Vijaydevji as the heir apparent to the throne and made suitable arrangements for his princely education. Left with no other alternative, she herself looked after the administration once a week.

Most of her time was spent in worshipping and listening to the holy discourses. The Brahmin used to come to her royal quarters every day and she listened to the holy stories with rapt attention. It was on one such occasion that the Queen had the above mentioned dialogue with the Brahmin. After this incident her desire for an encounter with God grew stronger. The queen observed two vows everyday: first, she arranged for the Brahmins to cook *shiro* and *puri* and then distributed it freely to pilgrims; and second, at dusk, she touched the feet of all the ascetics who were lodging at the *dharmashala*.

Once God willed it so that a *paramhansa* of Maharaj, Paramchaitanyanand Swami, arrived at Dharmapur during the course of his lonely wanderings. After having the lunch of *shiro* and *puri* he was resting in a corner of the *dharmashala*. In the evening Kushalkunvarba arrived there on her routine round and eventually Swami’s turn came. When she tried to touch his feet, he withdrew his feet and told her attendants, “I avoid females; please do not touch my feet.” Although she was surprised, she was a devout soul and therefore asked with curiosity, “Who are you?”

“I am a sadhu of Swaminarayan.”

“Who is Swaminarayan?”

With eyesight riveted on the ground, Swami replied, “He is God manifest.” And with these words there was a flash in Kushalkunvarba’s heart. But in order to observe the propriety of conversation in public, she invited Swami to the palace. The next day, a man came from the palace and Swami went with him and talked to Kushalkunvarba about the real identity and glory of Shriji Maharaj. Due to the spiritual endeavours of her previous births, she had a realization about the real identity of Maharaj. She made

arrangements for Paramchaitanyanand Swami to stay in a bungalow. Everyday she used to send a variety of dishes for him. Swami used to talk to her everyday about satsang and its glory. In the evening, Prince Vijaydevji took Swami on an elephant to the Hanuman Gadhi, outside the village for darshan.

When Maharaj came to know about this at Gadhada he asked two sadhus to go to Dharampur and bring back Paramchaitanyanand Swami. After many hardships on the way the sadhus reached Dharmapur, met Swami and conveyed the message of Maharaj. But Swami did not respond positively. The sadhus returned to Gadhada and reported to Maharaj. Maharaj said, When an elephant is in distress only another elephant can rescue it." So, Maharaj sent Muktanand Swami, instructing, "If the queen wishes to talk, talk for one hour with a curtain drawn in between." With a group of 25 sadhus, Muktanand Swami began the journey by boat from Bhavnagar and reached Valsad, from where they all reached Dharampur around four in the afternoon. It was a coincident that Paramchaitanyanand Swami was on the elephant alongwith the prince and they were on their way to Hanuman Gadhi. Seeing Muktanand Swami, he ordered to stop the ride, got off the elephant, prostrated before Swami and took him to the palace. He sent a message to Kushalkunvarba, "My guru Muktanand Swami has come." The Queen sent food for him also.

When the Queen expressed a desire to listen to the talks, Muktanand Swami said, "Maharaj has asked me to talk for one hour, so draw the curtain and place the hour glass." In this way, after listening to talks, the queen sent a word to Muktanand Swami that she was eager for the darshan of Maharaj and he should arrange for that at as soon as possible. Swami sent a message to her, "Send an invitation letter with your guru Paramchaitanyanand Swami. Maharaj will certainly come."

Having realized the glory of Maharaj, Kushalkunvarba removed the husk from some rice grains personally, saw to it that they remained whole and sent the clean and whole rice grains along with an invitation letter to Maharaj. Paramchaitanyanand Swami and other devotees carried the invitation to Maharaj.

After celebrating the festival of Kartik Punam os Samvat 1874 in Gadhada, Maharaj left for Dharampur with Gopalanand Swami and a group of sadhus and devotees. They passed Vartal and Bochasan and then crossed the rivers Mahi, Narmada and Tapi, reached Surat and then finally reached Dharmapur. When Vijaydev received the news of Maharaj's arrival he ran down the distance of a couple of kilometres to welcome Maharaj. He went there for welcome, with an army of decorated elephants, horses, chariots and palanquins. The prince prostrated before Maharaj. Then Maharaj was mounted on an elephant. The sadhus were accomodated in chariots and palanquins and the whole procession was brought to the town with pomp and glory.

Kushalkunvarba ran down to have the darshan of Maharaj – that divine *murti* which she had been longing to see for a long time. She placed her head at the feet of Maharaj and gripped his lotus feet. She became unconscious about herself. Tears began to flow down her cheeks, Maharaj then gripped her wrist and made her get up. Kushalkunvarba recovered her consciousness, and became one with the divine identity of Maharaj. She repeated these same words that, "I am surely liberated because you

have gripped my wrist, just as Shri Krishna had gripped the wrist of Rukminiji."

"You have been striving for *moksha* for many births. It was you who had got the well of Adalaj near Ahmedahad constructed. Today, at last, your merits have been fulfilled," said Maharaj, reassuring her with affection.

How could she let go such a wonderful opportunity of darshan? So with this temptation in mind, she asked Maharaj, "Maharaj, you had written in your letter that Swami Shri Sahajanandji Maharaj was dictating the letter from 'Anirdesh'. What is this Anirdesh?"

Maharaj could understand the feelings of the Queen, gave her darshan and said, "Your court is *nirdesh* and your town is *anirdesh*. Earth is *nirdesh* and water is *anirdesh*. Similarly he carried the analogy further to the extent of *tej, vayu, akash, ahamkar, mahattatva, pradhan* and *prakriti* and explained that, "*Prakriti* and *purush* are *nirdesh* and Akshardham which is beyond them, is Anirdesh. It was from there that I dictated the letter." Maharaj finished the statement but meanwhile, Kushalkunvarba was staring at Maharaj, without batting an eyelid, with rapt concentration and trying to meditate on the form of Maharaj full of divine splendour.

Lest such a rare opportunity should slip away, she prayed to Maharaj, in an overwhelming tone, to extend the stay for six months. Moreover, she requested Maharaj to invite other devotees from Kathiawad and other places. Maharaj replied, "People of Kathiawad ride on horses of fine breed and they have to pay the octroi duty at Bharuch, and if other devotees come they'll have to face the danger of robbers on the way." Kushalkunvarba then assured him, "I'll make arrangements for the exemption of the octroi duty at Bharuch, and also arrange for armed guards on the way for patrolling. So do call all of them here." Seeing her genuine love, Maharaj wrote letters to everyone inviting them there.

The queen herself supervised the arrangements for the best possible provisions to feed a variety of rich dishes everyday to Maharaj and the sadhus. When she came to know that the sadhus did not care to cook the food properly and ate the half-cooked food in order to hurry up for the darshan of Maharaj and consequently, spoil their health, she immediately made an arrangement for four Brahmin cooks. Besides this, when she saw that the sadhus put water in their bowls she requested Maharaj, "Tell the sadhus not to add water because this causes indigestion in this region." Such was her love for the sadhus of Maharaj.

For her God and sadhus, she ordered dry fruits and sweets of high quality from lands far-off. She also arranged for cartloads of sugarcane and chunks of fresh jaggery, milk, curd, ghee, sugar and other rations. Kushalkunvarba had diverted all her feelings in a single channel and that was to please Maharaj. Her devotion knew no bounds and she left no stone unturned for him.

To honour the wishes of the Queen, Vijayraj brought out a procession in state with a view to provide the citizens with an opportunity for the darshan of Maharaj. He led Maharaj and the sadhus to Hanuman Gadhi. Here the prince presented a feat of horse-riding before Maharaj. Maharaj was pleased and blessed him.

Soon, several groups of sadhus, devotees from Surat and Jivuba, Laduba and other

women devotess arrived from Gadhpur. Maharaj asked Kushalkunvarba to accommodate Jivuba in her own quarters and keep her constant company. Maharaj, too, granted the divine bliss to all the sadhus and devotees by giving them darshan and company. The sadhus remained busy by conducting discourse sessions. Maharaj served everyone with a variety of dishes everyday.

Every morning, he accompanied everyone to the river for ablutions. He obliged several new aspirants in the town by visiting their places. He visited the palace of Raja Raisinh of the neighbouring town, Vansada, and gave him an impression of his lotus feet as a mark of his grace and as a sacred memento.

Maharaj celebrated the festival of Vasant Panchmi with colours. On this occasion, two hundred Bhils came for darshan. The Queen requested Maharaj to bless everyone. So Maharaj sprinkled a bowlful of colour on the Bhils from a tub full of colour and said, “Those who are sprinkled with even a drop of this colour will be emancipated.”

After this, as wished by Kushalkunvarba, Vijaydev performed puja of Maharaj with rich costumes and ornaments. The entire body of Maharaj was covered with ornaments and then he performed *arti* and puja. At this juncture, the devout Queen said to Maharaj, “O Maharaj, this State, the treasury, everything is yours. Please stay here. Perform large scale *yagnas*, utilize all this wealth as you wish. We will claim only a handful of grains from that and render service to you...” In this way she repeatedly requested Maharaj, who was pleased and said, “l have not come in this world to rule. I have yet to liberate many souls. I advise even you, not to attach yourself with the State, otherwise you’ll have to take another birth.” So the queen again prayed to Maharaj and said, “Maharaj! I was just waiting for your arrival. Now please make me free of all desires and take me to your Dham.”

Maharaj distributed all the gold mohurs, which were offered to him, among all the servants of the State. After that, to honour the wishes of the Queen, he sanctified the palatial rooms, armoury and other places by paying a visit to them.

When Maharaj made preparations to leave, Kushalkunvarba repeated her request to extend the stay. She became frantic. Maharaj then consoled her and said, “Since you make this bearded fellow sit before you in the courtroom and listen to him, you will only see him when your end is near; so make separate arrangements for his seat. In your seat keep the impressions of my lotus feet and divert your attention there. Keep two female servants in attendance to read holy stories and listen to them.” With these words Maharaj gave her an impression of his lotus feet made with sandalwood paste as a mark of his special grace. Kushalkunvarba folded her hands and agreed to act accordingly. Thereafter, she accommodated Maharaj and the Prince on an elephant and covered a distance of a couple of kilometres to see them off.

After the departure of Maharaj, Kushalkunvarba felt the pangs of separation, but she bore it patiently and tried to live according to the words of Maharaj. She was reminded of the divine happiness she had experienced from Maharaj, the twenty two *artis* and all the meetings suffused with divine love, and many such other memories. Exactly on the fifteenth day after the departure of Maharaj, Kushalkunvarba passed away, remembering Maharaj. Precisely at that moment, the whole palace was divinely

illuminated. Referring to the event Maharaj told Jivuba and Laduba, “Today Kushalkunvarba passed away at Dharampur.”

6. Bhaktaraj Parvatbhai

Ramanand Swami had toured round Kathiawad and had spread the satsang fairly well. Parvatbhai of village Agatrai had also become his follower. This devotee who

looked like a rustic belonged to the Kanbi community. He remained constantly absorbed in meditation and devotion due to the impressions of spiritual endeavours of his previous births. When he had the darshan of Maharaj he immediately realized, as if he was a realized soul from his previous birth, the true identity of Maharaj as one who presided over Akshardham as Purna Purushottam Narayan and as *avatari* of all the avatars. So glorious was his realization.

Once he came to Loj for Maharaj's darshan. During the course of a conversation, Maharaj made a passing comment, "There is some shortage of grain in the almshouse." Parvatbhai who always carried out the wishes of Maharaj reached home. He collected the entire stock of grains from his house, about sixteen *kalashi*, loaded it in eight to ten carts and brought it to Loj. Maharaj stared at him and enquired, "Have you kept anything at home for your children or not ?"

"Maharaj, cocks and children of farmers never starve. They would fill their bellies even with the grains from the garbage," replied Parvatbhai with a smile. Maharaj and Muktanand Swami were highly pleased with his devotion.

Many times Maharaj used to praise Parvatbhai before the Kathi devotees. He would say that there is no other devotee like him in the Sorath region. Kathis, too, became eager to see such a devotee. Maharaj said, "When we are on our way to Junagadh, someday, we will go to Agatrai." Soon there was a programme for Junagadh. From there Maharaj arrived in Agatrai, accompanied by the group of Kathi Darbars.

On seeing Maharaj and the devotees, Parvatbhai was overjoyed. He laid down a couch for Maharaj and began to massage his feet. The Kathis began to search for fodder and feed for their horses. Not finding it anywhere, complained to Maharaj. Maharaj asked Parvatbhai to make provision for them. So Parvatbhai replied, "Maharaj, once the owner of the house is present, why should the servant worry?" Maharaj smiled at this and said, "Look here! He has made me the owner of the household. Now I shall have to take care of fodder and you." Parvatbhai then showed the Kathis barrels of grain. The Kathis removed the lids of the barrels and let their horses eat the grain. As if this were not enough, they let loose their horses among the heaps of fodder in the yard. Maharaj saw all this and gently censured them, "Do you spoil things in this way at your own homes?" And with these words, he made them behave themselves.

Seeing Parvatbhai's affection, Maharaj decided to offer a sumptuous lunch to the Kathis. The Kathis would rejoice if they got jaggery, rice and overflowing ghee. When the dishes were ready, first of all, Parvatbhai offered them to Maharaj with enthusiasm. Then the rows of Kathis were organized in the compound. Rice and jaggery were served. Then Maharaj came out with a bowl full of ghee. Parvatbbai put his hand on his own throat and requested Maharaj, "Maharaj. I swear, you should not stop the flow of ghee." The Kathis had also resolved that they would allow Maharaj to serve as much ghee as he liked and not to stop him. Maharaj began to serve. He started pouring ghee into bowls and poured it till bowls were full to the brim. Only when the Kathis would shout 'enough' would he move on, and moreover, he did not stop pouring at all, so the ghee was spilled on the ground too. Seeing this, Parvatbhai danced with joy and said, "Oh! look at the divine exploit of my dear one. Never has he indulged in such exploits."

The Kathis also uttered words of compliments, “Bravo! Parvat! Wonderful indeed! Other mountains would move but not this mountain (*parvat*). Parvatbhai is exactly like as he was described by Maharaj.”

Once when Parvatbhai was busy ploughing the farm, he wondered how God would have appeared when he was an incarnation of Varah? Maharaj then reflected that since Parvatbhai had thought of seeing one incarnation I will have to show him that and even if he wishes to see them all, they shall have to be shown to him; so why not show him all the 24 incarnations at a time? Parvatbhai was busy ploughing and remembering Maharaj. Suddenly, there was a flash and in the flash he saw all the 24 incarnations. Parvatbhai was wonderstruck and he could not help but utter, “Look at the grace of Maharaj.” But soon another idea came to his mind, “Who could be the cause of all these avatars?” Meanwhile, he saw all the avatars being absorbed into the form of Maharaj and all his doubts were removed.

Parvatbhai used to see the form of Maharaj constantly. He even used to see Akshardham, Golok, Vaikunth and other abodes. He could also see the cosmic design. Like a man holding a *chintamani* and getting his desires fulfilled, Parvatbhai constantly remembered Maharaj and had all his desires fulfilled.

Once, Parvatbhai was busy ploughing the farm. It was noon. So Parvatbhai began to offer lunch to Maharaj mentally. Parvatbhai was engrossed in the image of Maharaj and consequently, the speed of his plough was reduced. The ploughman who was following him thought, “Parvatbhai is dosing.” So he prodded him with an implement. Parvatbhai shook a bit and from his apparently empty hands, curd rolled down on the plough as well as on the ground. The ploughman, who was following him, was surprised and asked, “Where did the curd come from?” Parvatbbai quietly replied, “I was mentally offering a lunch of curd and *rotla* to Maharaj. Maharaj fulfilled my devotion and you prodded me at that moment. So this curd rolled from my hand.” The ploughman was astonished to see the elevated state of Parvatbhai. All the employees of Parvatbhai also became *satsangis*, influenced by Parvatbhai’s devotion.

When some devotee reported this incident to Maharaj in Gadhada, he wrote a letter, handed it over to Mayaram Bhatt and sent him to Agatrai. Mayaram Bhatt came to Agatrai and delivered it to Parvatbhai. After reading the letter Parvatbhai was immediately prepared to leave for Gadhada. At that time Parvatbhai’s son was seriously ill. His end was almost near. So Mayaram Bhatt said, “This boy is in critical condition and likely to collapse at any moment, and where are you planning to go?”

Parvatbhai firmly replied, “The letter you have brought says that I must go to Gadhada soon, so not even a moment’s delay is tolerable.”

Parvatbhai had hardly covered a distance of a few furlongs when a man came there chasing him. Seeing him Parvatbhai had a premonition, so he changed his clothes and put on a long piece of cloth. When the man came nearer he asked him, “Why have you come? If the boy has passed away, then perform his funeral rites. I will not come back.” With these words, Parvatbhai took a bath in the river and went ahead. The man who had come to take him back was disappointed.

Parvatbhai reached Gadhada and prostrated before Maharaj. Although he himself

was omniscient, Maharaj asked a question to Parvatbhai so that the others could come to know, “Your son was in a critical condition. Is he alright now?”

“Maharaj he is alright now. He will now be spared the trouble of ploughing the field. He is freed from tilling the land and is peaceful in your Akshardham.”

“You are not at all bereaved or grieved even by the death of your son?” asked Maharaj. Parvatbhai replied, “If one of the legs of the cot is broken we might have cause to grieve because we would have to look for a carpenter, but my son is residing in your ever blissful Dham.” On hearing this, Maharaj smiled and other members of the audience were taken by surprise.

Once, Maharaj visited Agatrai. Parvatbhai took Maharaj and the devotees to his farm. In the farm the crop of sugarcane was dancing to the tune of the breeze. Parvatbhai selected some good sugarcane sticks, peeled them, cut them into pieces and then offered them to Maharaj. Maharaj consumed them with pleasure and then gave a handful of them to Parvatbhai. Parvatbhai said, “l have taken a vow not to eat them. I can take them only if my choicest deity takes them.” “Who is your choicest deity?” asked Maharaj. “Well, these sadhus are my choicest deites. It was they who introduced you to me. So I can eat only after they eat. You have made them take the vow to abstain from *khatras*, and from that day all the members of my family have also taken a vow to abstain from *khatras*,” replied Parvatbhai politely. Maharaj was pleased to know this. Then he relaxed the vows by making the sadhus eat the sugarcane. Parvatbhai also consumed it. He gave up the vow after a year and a half. He was one with the sadhus to such a great extent!

Maharaj used to take care of such devotees. Once Parvatbhai had been in Gadhada with Maharaj. At that time, seeing the farm unguarded, some thieves entered his field to steal the ready crop of wheat. Just when they tried to pluck the wheat corn, they felt a hard beating on their backs. The thieves alerted themselves, but found no one around. Again they tried to pick the wheat corn, but once more they felt the beatings on the backs. So they took off. They tried again at the other end of the field but experienced the same plight. Frustrated, the thieves took off, thoroughly disappointed. They were convinced that Swaminarayan was guarding Parvatbhai’s field. At times, Parvatbhai used to call the thieves and give away crops to them and tell them the glory of Maharaj. Also, he used to employ new ploughmen every now and then, and tell them about the glory of Maharaj and make them *satsangis*.

Once, the attendant of Dada Khachar had fallen ill. So, Maharaj began to ask everyone who came to the assembly whether he would serve as Dada Khachar’s attendant. But everyone refused. The Kathi Darbars said, “We are ourselves owners of a number of horses. Why should we serve as attendants of anyone?” Maharaj remembered Parvatbhai. Precisely then, Parvatbhai entered the assembly. When he prostrated before Maharaj, Maharaj asked him, “Will you serve as an attendant of Dada Khachar?”

“Yes, Maharaj, I will become his attendant,” replied Parvatbhai, without any hesitation. Then he added, “As it is, we are already attendants of our family members, and here on the contrary, I am fortunate in becoming an attendant of a devotee of

God."

Once, in order to test everyone's faith, Maharaj said, "Those who were *satsangis* of the couch should sit near me and those who were *satsangis* of the *satsangi* should sit at the back." Most of the sadhus and devotees sat near the couch of Maharaj. Only Parvatbhai sat at a distance. Others felt that this man was a fool. Then Maharaj climbed down from his seat and went over to where Parvatbhai was sitting. It was then that everyone realized that the real pleasure of Maharaj lies in being a devotee of the devotees. Everyone obviously liked to be a devotee of God but the real characteristic of devotion lies in being a devotee of the devotees.

Once there was a year of famine. Maharaj asked the sadhus not to go to the surrounding villages, with a view to spare the devotees from difficulties. It was then that Parvatbhai approached Maharaj, told him in a complaining tone, "We are facing two famines." Maharaj asked, "Why do you say that?" He replied, "On the one hand nature has sent a famine and, on the other hand you have imposed a ban on the sadhus visiting the villages, depriving us of their company and an opportunity to serve them. This is the second famine." Maharaj was glad to see Parvatbhai's deep understanding and sent the sadhus to his village. This speaks of his deep devotion.

He was equally keen on remaining in Maharaj's company. Once when he was trying to cut a branch of a tree in order to make a fencing, the axe slipped from his hands and fell on his feet. But as he was wearing shoes, the front portion of the shoe was cut and his foot was saved. Parvatbhai who constantly remembered Maharaj, thought, "If the axe had injured my foot I would have been confined to bed, but Maharaj has saved me. So, I should go to Gadhada and remain in the company of Maharaj for that much time." Such was his deep understanding. He went to Gadhada and remained in the company of Maharaj. Maharaj, too, was pleased.

Once Parvatbhai and his wife had gone to Gadhada for the darshan of Maharaj. Parvatbhai remained busy sitting near Maharaj, listening to the holy stories and having darshan. Seeing this, Maharaj asked Mayaram Bhatt, "Find out from Parvatbhai's wife as to where he takes his meals?" On enquiry she revealed, "He does not take his meals here. He must be taking *prasad* of Maharaj." Mayaram Bhatt conveyed his findings to Maharaj. Then Maharaj also said, "He does not eat here." Finally, Maharaj asked Parvatbhai about it. He replied, "Maharaj! How can I forsake your blissful darshan for petty loaves? I am satiated by your darshan." In this way, Parvatbhai had not taken meals for seven days. He had derived pleasure simply from the darshan of Maharaj. Nobody else could possibly endure so much. Maharaj then called Brahmachari and made the devotee eat.

Parvatbhai was so devout that Maharaj constantly remembered him. Maharaj had told Brahmanand Swami and Muktanand Swami, "My real *satsangis* are those like Parvatbhai and Gordhanbhai, because they considered their soul as Akshar and see me at all times."

7. Bhaktaraj Shivlal Sheth

"This son of yours has become a follower of the Swami. He is crazy after the Swami who is a guest at the court of our ruler Hamir Khachar. He keeps on saying "Swami.....

Swami," complained the schoolmaster to the mother about Nagarsheth's son, whom he had brought with him, gripping by the wrist. The mother tried to coax the son who boldly replied, "I am crazy after Swami. I have gulped the nectar down my throat which I won't release. I shall not budge an inch even if my father scolds me."

The mother again tried to coax her only son; but Swami was prasied in every house of the village since the day Vyapakanand Swami had revived the dead favourite mare of Darbar Hamir Khachar. He was famous all over the region. Due to the impressions of spiritual endeavours of his previous births, Nagarsheth's son, who was a friend of the sons of the Kathi Darbar, realized Swami's true identity at a very young age.

Then the leading member of Jain society and a favourite of Bhavnagar State, Bhaichand Doshi, tried to persuade his son, using all the tact at his command, but his son remained firm like a rock. As a last resort, he confined his heir apparent in a room for one full day. But the son did not change his mind. The father felt embarassed that he himself was a leading personality among the Jains and his son would desert the ancestral religion in order to join Swami's sect. Sheth was worried that he was fast losing his family reputation.

Sheth left no stone unturned to retrieve his son from the Satsang. Finally, he took his son to Vajesang Bapu who was the ruler of the Bhavnagar State. The clever son made it clear to Bapu, "I have done nothing wrong. In fact, by my contact with Swami I lived a scrupulous life and had been able to avoid improper habits." Bapu was pleased with this child's understanding and gave him his consent to do as he liked.

After this event, the firmness on the part of Bhaga Doshi increased. His desires to serve the sadhus and remain in their company grew stronger. Once he stole away some ration from the house, went to the Darbar and gave it to Maharaj. Maharaj refused to accept the ration which was stolen. So Bhaga Doshi was upset, went home and began to cry. Bhaichand Sheth was also surprised that many other ascetics made a lot of fuss for getting the ration, and this one refused to accept it, therefore, there must be some divine strengh in Swaminarayan. Bhaichand Sheth accompanied his son to Maharaj and took some ration with him. The very first sight of the divine form of Maharaj, and seeing the sadhus taking their meals by mixing everything in a wooden bowl so as to make it tasteless, evoked a positive response in the heart of Sheth. From then onwards, Bhaga Doshi's dislike for satsang disappeared.

After the death of Bhaichand Sheth, Bhaga Doshi not only maintained his reputation but added to it and lived up to his position as Nagar Sheth. Bhaga Doshi was worth nine lakhs rupees, but he did not give in to the social and other temptations. He upheld satsang at any cost and thus earned the grace of Maharaj.

The son of such a pious father was also an extremely pious soul. Shivlalbhai, was born in Botad in the Samvat year 1882. Since he was the only son, he was brought up with extreme care and affection. When Shivlalbhai was 15 months old Bhaga Doshi took him to Maharaj at Gadhada. Maharaj blessed the child by touching his head and said, "This is King Siddhavallabh. He had rendered service to me. But as there was some lapse in it, he has had to be born at your place."

From his very childhood his life was simple and devoted. Moreover, he had the

advantage of the darshan and the company of able sadhus like Gopalanand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami, Siddhanand Swami, Yoganand Swami, and Bhai Atmanand Swami. As a result of this, his aptitude for devotion to God and indifference towards the mundane life were strengthened.

At a very young age he wished to renounce the world and he had expressed his wish to Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj. But as he was the only son of a rich father, Acharya Maharaj persuaded him not to do so. However, his keenness had been increasing day by day. He was keen on offering constant devotion to Maharaj. Even on his way he never deviated from his devotion. At the shop also, he would talk only if it was a must. He would not waste his time in sheer gossip. He kept a *murti* of Maharaj just opposite his seat and always carried either the Vachanamrut or a *mala* in his hand.

Once it so happened that Shivlalbhai's sister-in-law had come to his place on some auspicious occasion. Shivlalbhai, who lived in a joint family and did not talk to women unless there was a reason to do so, did not even know about her presence in the house for two to three months. His life was busy with devotion. He performed *mansi* puja five times daily, visited the mandir at dusk and returned home only after singing *chesta*. This was his routine. Even at the shop he had cultivated the habit of devoting himself to God. Once he was taking his meals at home and his sister-in-law came to serve something. She unwittingly served excess ghee in the rice and naturally, he looked up and saw his sister-in-law. He asked her, "When did you come?" Hearing this question, the sister-in law felt a bit insulted. But others pacified her by explaining that Shivlalbhai's condition was always spiritual.

On his way from the shop to the mandir, there was a small house made of mud. The owner of the house demolished that house and built a mansion there. Shivlalbhai always used to pass from that way but he had never paid any attention to that. Once, as he was passing from there, he sneezed and casually looked up. For the first time he saw the mansion and asked innocently, "When was this mansion constructed?" Everyone who was passing from there laughed and said, "It is there for six months."

Once Bhaga Doshi, along with his family, was travelling along in a cart to Gadhpur for the darshan. Shivlalbhai was also accompanying him. On the way, Bhaga Doshi was busy talking about his practical experiences regarding land and crops. After a few minutes Shivlalbhai remarked, "All these talks will not bring cartloads of crops to our house. So as we are going for the darshan of God we had better go there remembering him. This will bring peace in the heart from his proximity." These words opened the eyes of Bhaga Doshi and others.

As Botad was on the way from Gadhada to Vartal, almost all the *sadgurus* used to break their journey there. Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami had made it a point in particular to go to Botad twice a year, on his way to Vartal for festivals. He would be accompanied by a group of sadhus also. Shivlalbhai would take the benefit of their company by requesting them to stay over for some days. Many times he even used to accompany Swami to Vartal for festivals. Sometimes he even used to go to Junagadh to remain in the company of Swami. At times he had occasion to accompany Swami to the forest of Sankhadavadar. On such occasions he would stay with Swami in a hut and

would eat the *rotla* and *adad dal*. His love for Swami's company was so profound that he tolerated all hardships.

In the beginning, Shivlalbhai had more attachment with Gopalanand Swami. But when Swami was about to depart for Dham, he advised, "If you wish to learn the lessons of practical life go to Punja Sheth of Sundariyana, but if you want to learn the lessons of practical life as well as the lessons of *moksha* go to Gunatitanand Swami – the Jogi of Junagadh." According to the instructions of Gopalanand Swami Shivlalbhai, although he belonged to the Gadhada region, boldly remained in the company of Gunatitanand Swami and pleased him. For doing this, he had to face numerous hardships.

Once when Raghuviriji Maharaj was at Gadhada, Sayajirao Gaekwad was to come to the mandir for darshan. On this occasion, according to the wishes of Acharya Maharaj, Shivlalbhai became the organizer for his welcome procession. Shivlalbhai always used to don simple clothes, and it was in this routine dress that he was about to lead the procession when Acharya Maharaj asked him to dress well. But Shivlalbhai replied, "I only have these clothes and I never put on any ornaments." However, to honour the wishes of Acharya Maharaj, he joined the procession in a good attire with ornaments. But he removed the good attire and ornaments as soon as he returned from the procession, and donned his usual clothes. It was the result of Gunatitanand Swami's company that Shivlalbhai could be so indifferent even in the midst of prosperity. He took care of the old devotee Rathod Dhadhal of Sarangpur till he lived because Maharaj had instructed him in a dream to do so. Moreover, when the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj was consecrated in Gadhpur, he organized a wonderful ceremony and spent about Rs. 22,000.

However, one day, Swami invited Shivlalbhai to join him in the cart and said, "You think that you have done something great because you sponsored the *murti* consecration ceremony at Gadhada and invited Raghuvirji Maharaj to Bhavnagar. But when I look at your *jiva*, I feel that satsang is no longer predominant in your heart." The reason for was that due to some bad company Shivlalbhai had developed an ego of his business skills, and had a slight doubt in Swami's divinity. But Swami could sense his feelings and spoke the above words and also added, "To abandon such a sadhu and to wish for happiness is like the calf who separated from its mother and went to the cowshed to drink more milk. But the bulls were there, so wherever it tried to poke its face it got a kick and consequently, its face became swollen. When its mother returned from grazing, the calf could not suck milk due to its swollen face. Similarly, those who abandon such a sadhu and seek happiness elsewhere will get a kick because there will be a lapse in the worship and obeying of orders, and then it will be impossible to sit near the sadhu, just as the calf could not suck milk from its mother." Swami further added, "Such talks delivered continuously for two months would enable you to attach yourself to God as before, and thus overcome the spiritual degeneration."

Shivlalbhai quietly listened to these divine words from Swami. He was a true aspirant so he could tolerate the harsh words of Swami. Thus he realized his own lapses, appreciating that great sadhus would not treat others in such a way unless there

was intimacy between them.

Once when Swami was addressing an assembly he heard some cracking sound. So Swami asked, “Who ios chewing a bone?” Hearing these words Shivlalbhai got up, went out, spat out the betel nut and returned to the assembly. From that moment he resolved not to eat betel nut. But he did not take Swami’s words amiss.

Once he went to the market and earned some money out of speculation in gold and from that money, he decided to give a feast in the mandir of Junagadh. Commenting on his decision, Swami said, “You decided to buy gold but have you ever thought of buying one hundred quintals of dust? Except the form of Maharaj there is only dust upto Prakriti and Purush. It is a colossal loss that you have missed the darshan and company of this sadhu and his talks.”

Swami had complete faith in Shivlalbhai’s keen aspiration and therefore, he often gave him the true knowledge even by reprimanding him.

Shivlalbhai was also a man of intense faith, so he swallowed the affectionate words of Swami as if it was a sweet delicacy. In this way Swami moulded the character of Shivlalbhai.

Shivlalbhai had a tremendous capacity for meditation, Once Bhaga Doshi asked him, “Shivlalbhai, teach me to meditate as you do. “ Shivlalbhai then replied, “Father, you won’t be able to meditate as I do because what I do, first of all, is to put our house as well as the city of Botad on fire, make a heap of the ashes and then sit on it forgetting my body...” Hearing these words. Bhaga Dosbi interrupted him to say, “Shiva, keep your meditation to yourself, I don’t want to learn it.” And his meditation was indeed of that sort. Once when he was in meditation some pots full of ghee rolled down from the top and ghee was spilled on the steps; but Shivlalbhai had no idea whatsoever. When Bhaga Doshi asked him about it, he replied, “What is there in it to know? That which was to be spilled in the belly was spilled on the steps.” And he was indeed not affected even a bit.

Shivlalbhai has also made notes about the wonderful talks of Gunatitanand Swami regarding spiritual knowledge. In the notes there is a fine reference about Swami’s affection for him. He writes, “I had a fever at Vartal on the second day of Chaitra *vad*, and he came to see me on the third day of Chaitra *vad* and made me alright. Then he said in the assembly at Vartal that just as there is close relation between a father and a son, similar is the case with a guru and his disciple. In this reference he was the guru and I was his disciple meaning, he was the father and I the son.”

Sadguru Bhai Atmanand Swami, who had met Shriji Maharaj, spent the latter years of his life in the village of Vagad. Since it was near Botad, Shivlalbhai often used to go to Vagad to remain in the company of Bhai Atmanand Swami, and as a result of that he had developed attachment for this *sadguru*. Once, Gunatitanand Swami came to Vagad and had talked to Bhai Atmanand Swami about the glory of Maharaj and to offer single-minded devotion to him. As a result of this, Bhai Atmanand Swami realized the supremacy of Maharaj and also the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman. After that Gunatitanand Swami had told Shivlalbhai, “Maharaj will now take your guru to Dham.”

That is what happened. Bhai Atmanand Swami passed away after a brief illness. Soon after that Shivlalbhai, too, had high temperature and Bhaga Doshi came to Vagad to take him back. At first, he did not agree to go back but then, at the insistence of the sadhus, he had no alternative but to go to Botad. There, he did not go to his house, but stayed at the mandir. After a few days, he passed away to render service to Maharaj at a young age on 5 July 1859 (Ashadh *sud* 5, Samvat 1916).

Glossary

A

adad dal A type of edible pulse

anirdesh undefinable

arti Hindu worship ritual of waving lighted wicks before the murti of God

ashtang-yoga eight-fold yoga

avatari The supreme avatar, the highest incarnation of God

B

brahmacharya celibacy

C

chesta verses sung before bedtime about the daily routine and glory of Shriji Maharaj

chintamani wish-fulfilling gem

D

dal spicy soup of dissolved pulses

darbar royal court

dharmashala rest home for pilgrims

J

jari brocade on garment using gold or silver thread

jiva soul

K

kalashi a unit of weight

kalpa day of Brahma

kartal percussion instrument

kaupin loin-cloth

khatras an observance in which only food devoid of the six types of taste – sweet, salty, bitter, sour, spicy – is eaten

khichdi spiced boiled rice and lentil grain

M

mahant The head sadhu of a mandir

mala rosary

mangala arti first of the five artis in a shikharbaddh mandir; performed at sunrise

mansi form of worship in which one mentally offers puja, arti, thal, etc., to God

mat-panthis members of a sect which permits immoral behaviour

maya anything that deviates one from the worship of God

moksha release from the cycle of births and deaths and attaining Akshardham where one offers eternal devotion to Purushottam

mukta a liberated soul

murti sacred icon of God that is worshipped

N

nirdesh pointable, definable

P

paramhansa 'Supreme swan'. A male sadhu of the highest order, characterized by his ability to discriminate between sat and asat – just as swans were traditionally considered to be able to distinguish between milk mixed with water

pativrata fidelity

prakriti see maya

prasad sanctified food, blessed and consecrated by having been offered to God

pujari the priest of a mandir who performs the necessary rites and rituals

puri small, flat and round fried pieces of wheat dough. Usually eaten with curried vegetables

R

rajbhog third arti of the day performed after lunch has been offered to the deities

rotla an unleavened bread

S

sadguru a senior sadhu

satsang good company; spiritual association

satsangi one who practices satsang

shakotasv vegetable festival

sher a unit of weight – approximately one half of a kilogramme

shiro a sweet delicacy, usually made of wheat flour, ghee, sugar and condiments

sud the bright half of a month. So Kartik sud means 'the bright half of the month of Kartik'

swadharma one's own dharma

U

upasana philosophical understanding of the nature of God as well as the mode of worship of God, i.e., how one understands God's nature, and how one worships him. Sometimes synonymous with bhakti

V

vad the dark half of a month. So Kartik vad means 'the dark half of the month of Kartik'

Y

yagna ceremonial offering ritual performed as a form of worship to seek the good favour and receive the blessings of the deities